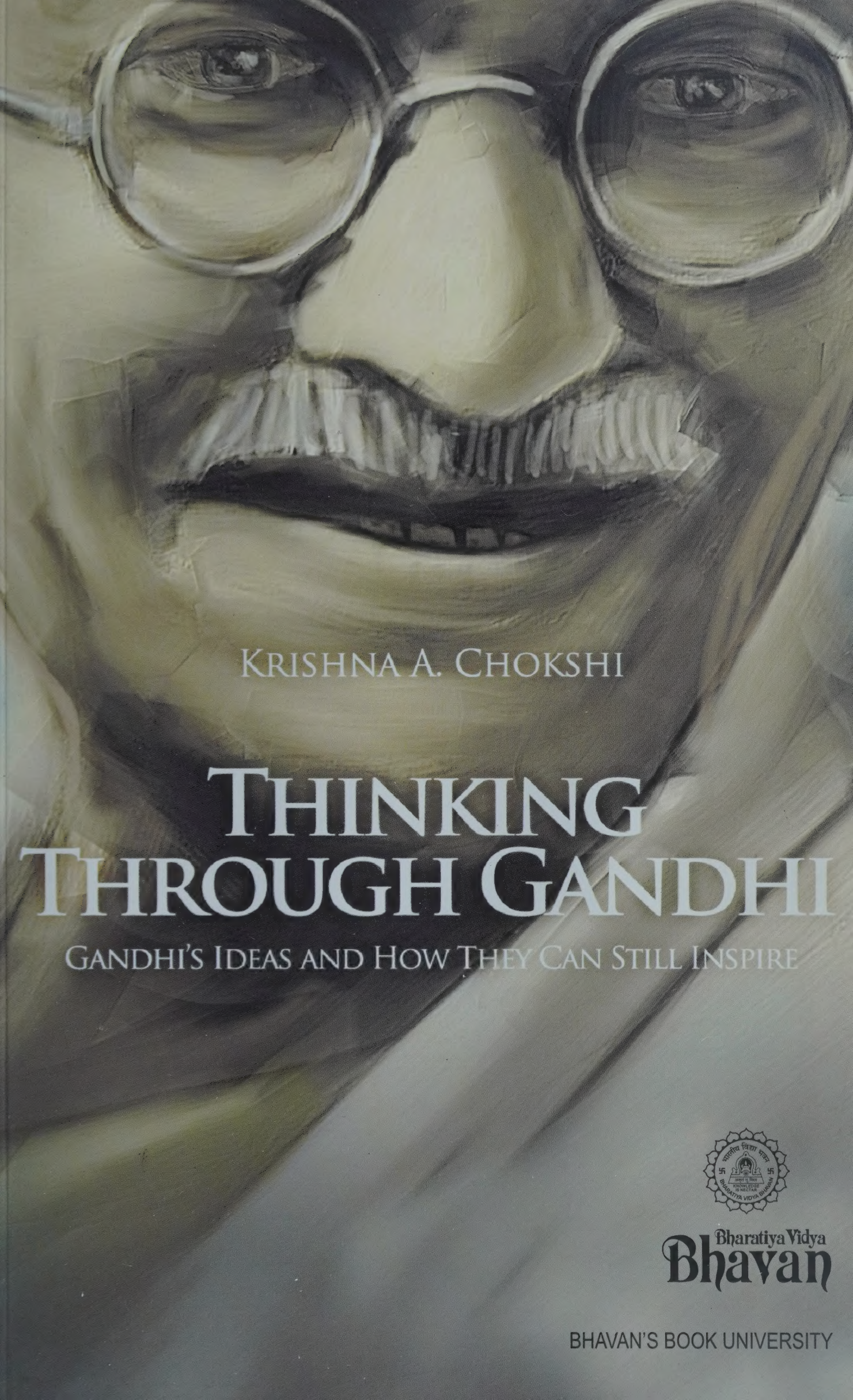




KRISHNA A. CHOKSHI

THINKING THROUGH GANDHI

GANDHI'S IDEAS AND HOW THEY CAN STILL INSPIRE



Bharatiya Vidya
Bhavan

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

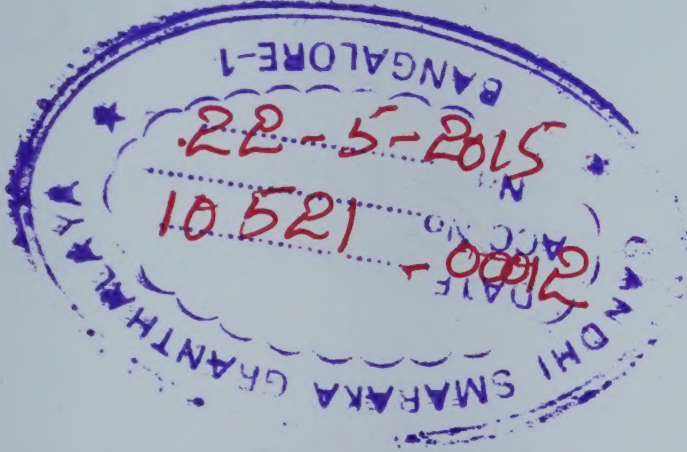
आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

ā no bhadraḥ kratavo yantu viśvataḥ

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

- Rg Veda I - 89-i

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY



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Gandhi's Ideas and How They Can Still Inspire

by

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*Gandhi's Ideas and
How They Can Still Inspire*

KRISHNA A. CHOKSHI



2013

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

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*For my parents,
who embrace who I am and
encourage what I aspire to become*

The Blessed Lord said: Fearlessness, purification of one's existence, cultivation of spiritual knowledge, charity, self-control, performance of sacrifice, study of the Vedas, austerity and simplicity; non-violence, truthfulness, freedom from anger; renunciation, tranquility, aversion to faultfinding, compassion and freedom from covetousness; gentleness, modesty and steady determination; vigor, forgiveness, fortitude, cleanliness, freedom from envy and the passion for honor — these transcendental qualities, O son of Bharata, belong to godly men endowed with divine nature.

– Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 16: 1-3.

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My Views on *Thinking Through Gandhi*

- Dr. P. Jayaraman

Mahatma Gandhi was the greatest integrator of the 20th century, as Mr. N.A.Palkhivala says, "Throughout his life he worked ceaselessly to channel service and institutionalize brotherhood." (Essential Unity of All Religions by Mr. N. A. Palkhivala). To understand the Mahatma and his ideals and philosophy of non-violence, *satyagraha* and service to mankind and environment, one should go through his time, the then happenings in India and other parts of the world and the influences of people and situations on him. Such an attempt will not be easy since the Mahatma's character and philosophy were the creations of his beliefs, traditions and faith and of the circumstances prevalent then. This effort will be particularly much more difficult when somebody tries to study, understand and analyze the situations which carved the personality of the Mahatma. We cannot easily study him in the present day background, but we can give answers to questions of present day world affairs through the practical and psychological analysis of his ways and his methods for creating goodwill and peace on earth.

With this background when we glance through Krishna Chokshi's book, *Thinking Through Gandhi: Gandhi's Ideas and How They Can Still Inspire*, we see her in-depth study and search for the inner meaning of all that the Mahatma said, did and asked us to do or follow. She gives a new meaning to the Mahatma's attempts and ideologies with a modern perspective and offers her analysis, comparing them with the thoughts and doctrines of present day thinkers and practical philosophers.

Krishna Chokshi is curious to know the subtle meaning of Gandhi's thoughts, sayings and actions and therefore reads in between the lines to give us her thoughtful interpretation of his words and deeds in his personal and national life.

The first sentence in her 'Preface' to the book entitled 'My Aspiration' — which reads thus — "*Thinking Through Gandhi* is an honest result of my personal struggle to live consistently and to act ethically..." itself conveys the honest method Krishna has adopted to understand and analyze the inward and external struggles Gandhi had faced and experienced and the non-violent method he followed to attain freedom for India and for the world community.

It is amazing to see how Krishna, a young woman of the present day world who has not seen Gandhi and his life personally, but who has studied him from her childhood with an analytical mind, has explained in clear terms her thoughts on Gandhi's principles and their usefulness in the modern world, which has become extremely advanced but increasingly violent and confused.

Krishna has used a very simple sentence — What Can I do ? — in her preface which encourages the reader to continue thinking after finishing reading the book, what can I do to follow and practice the ideals and philosophy of Gandhi in my personal and collective life?

The last sentence of the book summarizes her concept of Gandhi's legacy, which she rightly says, "...challenges us in our personal aspirations to live ethically, consciously and peacefully."

That is the success of her writing

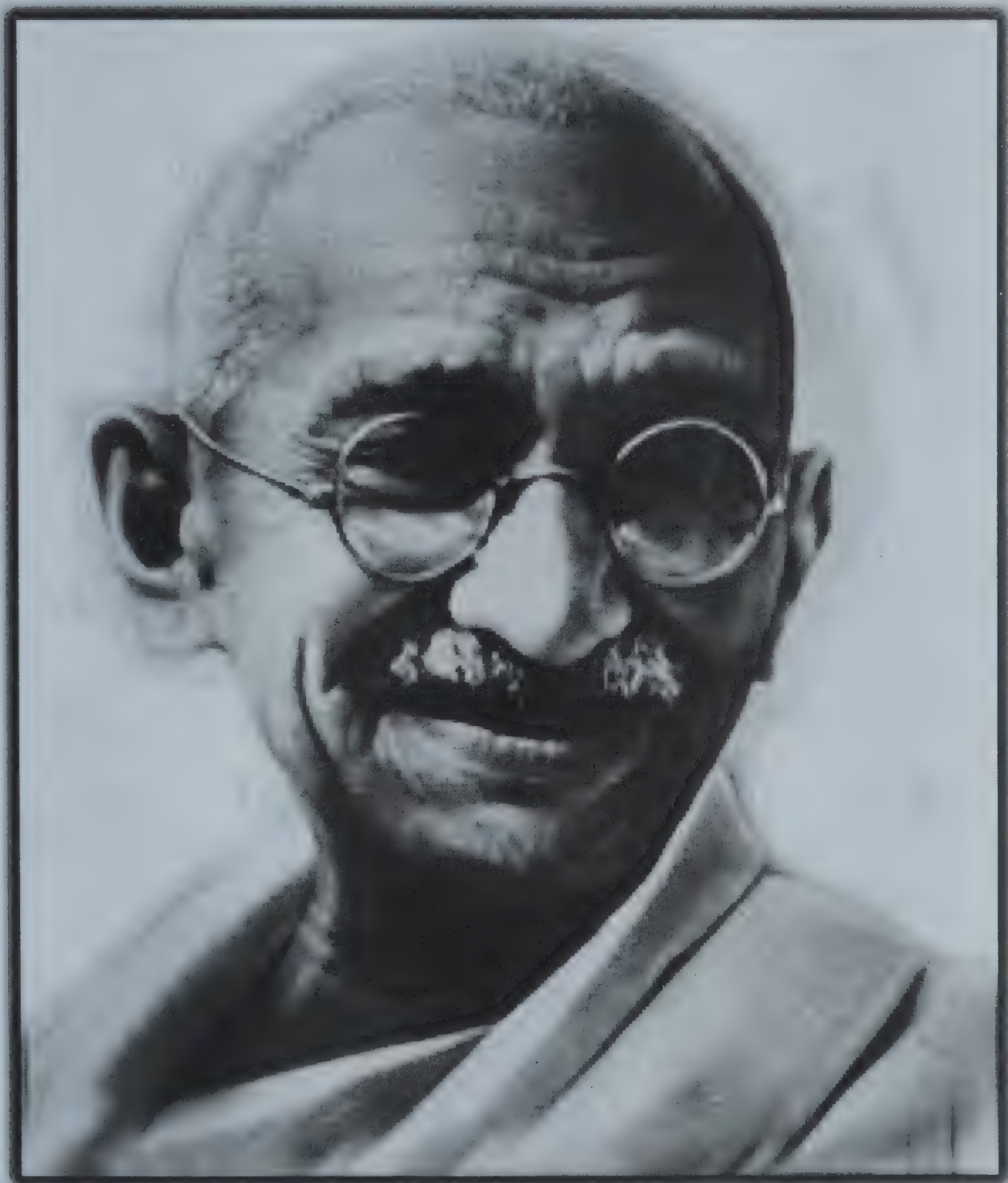
I congratulate Krishna Chokshi for her clarity, cogent expression of her thoughts and straightforward analysis of the subject she has taken up as her life's mission. She has passionately opened up a line of thought on the Mahatma's legacy, which will attract future researchers to provide further light on the subject for the benefit of the world community.

I wish, the book is brought out as early as possible so that many would benefit from her clear understanding of Gandhi's ideas and ideology.

— Dr. P. Jayaraman

New York, NY

2012



Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

1

My Aspiration

Thinking Through Gandhi is an honest account of my personal struggle to live consistently and to act ethically. Human connection is the cohesive element of this collection of essays, and it is this recognition of inter-relatedness that is perhaps most capable of inspiring personal transformation. We are increasingly aware of what unites us; we share space, resources, security concerns, and sometimes a common morality, but most importantly, we are linked by our humanity. Although it is imperative to be sensitive to how we are connected, solidarity cannot end at recognition.

Today, Gandhi's legacy can inspire outrage against the persistent forms of inequality, along with an enduring commitment to work for others, while providing an impetus to look within and evolve our own selves. His example continues to affirm the power of individuals to fundamentally change things, but at the same time, these changes cannot be regarded as simply or pointedly political. His struggle was not just against colonial violence; it was fundamentally about interrogating and purifying the Self. In this sense, his methods and principles integrated how we live in the world with what we ought to do for the world. Inequality is the greatest form of violence our world faces today, and we are all in some ways complicit in its perpetuation, and capable of addressing it. If Gandhi's message can do anything for us, it must motivate us to be more than passive bystanders; it must prompt us to ask, *What must I do?*

Non-violence holds little relevance if it does not inspire principled action; it cannot remain a set of theoretical concepts that are argued and not actively applied. The following essays explore some of Gandhi's main ideas about *satya* (*truth*) and *ahimsa* (*Non-violence*), and suggest ways to begin thinking through these principles in one's own life. *What does it mean to be truthful, to be peaceful, to be consistent?* These have been my motivating questions, and they continue to inspire thought and reflection on how I can best translate Non-violence into directed, ethical action.

My goal has not been to be a "Gandhian," but instead to extend Gandhi's core principles and make them relevant for my individual context. It is easy to conflate lifestyle with values; while how we live is deeply connected to what we believe, simply emulating Gandhi's lifestyle can be just another way of emphasizing image over substance. Is it honest to adopt vegetarianism, *khadi* (homespun) cloth, or outward simplicity without fully embracing the ethos underlying those choices? It is far more meaningful to reinvigorate the principles that Gandhi embodied and to be honest in experimenting with them on our own terms, than to mindlessly re-create his path, ignoring the responsibility to forge our own.

Embodying the values of *satya* and *ahimsa* is more a process and aspiration than a final point of arrival. Just as with personal spirituality, there are as many ways of translating these ideas as there are individuals to interpret them. The ideas put forth in these essays are invitations to consider what it means to be conscious of our methods, power, politics, duties, daily choices, and our political communities. Most importantly, these ideas connect spirituality with politics, refining our ethical stances and dignifying our common humanity.

Gandhi's seamless integration of his faith, political and social

vision, and interpersonal ethics is best captured in his famous talisman quote:

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away.¹

The activist and love-inspired values of this sentiment are ultimately concerned with how we engage with and relate to our global and local communities, and most importantly, to ourselves. Living consciously and being in tune with the needs of others is not about being altruistic, nor should it be thought of as a way to feel good about oneself. Rather, living this way is about cultivating purpose and recognizing that our happiness is contingent on our willingness to live for something beyond our own wellbeing.

The conviction in living purposefully and for others is integrally linked to understanding ourselves as part of a larger community, and out of this sense of belonging arises the substance for ethical action – even if such conviction necessitates making tough choices. If we are to live fully engaged, conscious lives, we cannot be directed by rational sense alone, but must also be guided by moral obligations. I am reminded of Martin Luther King Jr.’s words in reference to the Vietnam War, “Ultimately a genuine leader is not

a searcher of consensus but a molder of consensus. On some positions cowardice asks the question, is it safe? Expediency asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? But conscience asks the question, is it right?"² Thinking about and acting on what we think is right is at the core of Gandhi's life message, and must be carried forward. The fearlessness that this requires, and in turn cultivates, is the essence of the transformative process that I discuss throughout these essays.

Thinking ethically is as much about how we perceive ourselves, as it is how we perceive others. In this way, our political commitments are deeply connected to our personal ideologies and how we aspire to live in the world. My own reckoning with privilege has generated questions of what I owe to others. I have often felt tremendous guilt about all the resources that are available to me, while others may have more hardship. What does it mean when we learn about poverty and suffering through elitist films, jargon-filled academic writing, or through "parties for causes?" Is the task of "finding oneself" even worth mentioning, when others are hard-pressed to provide for their families? Gratitude for my own opportunities has motivated me to make positive contributions, rather than to merely empathize from afar. Inspired by Gandhi's de-emphasis on claiming personal rights and his vehement insistence on the performance of individual duties, I have come to see social responsibility as a basic obligation, rather than a virtue.

As a young person, I was forced to confront my own inconsistencies in my efforts to live as a "Gandhian," which sparked a process of introspective questioning that interestingly did not begin in India, but in France. I was visiting my godmother's aunt, and I vividly remember entering her *chateau* and being greeted by a life-size wooden cutout of Lenin. I was taken aback by the sheer size of him, but I turned to my godmother and said, "That is so

cool,” with an excited smile across my face. I was in high school at the time and still in my revolutionary communist phase. As young people often do, I had viewed a particular ideology as representative of me, and as capable of offering me preformed answers. I was excited to have some engaging and instructive political conversations with Catou, my godmother’s aunt, an octogenarian, French communist.

As a high school student, I was interested in communism and socialism because they resonated with my instinctual feelings about Gandhian social ethics. They provided initial answers to some of my questions about how people should behave towards each other—it seemed almost like commonsense. I had earnestly looked through books such as *Communism is Alive!* in search of methods for transforming lofty ideas into daily actions. For me, the overarching principles of equality and justice that both communism and “Gandhism” lay forth resonated with my own preoccupation with Gandhi, and with my understanding of ahimsa. I saw the ethical treatment of others as a primary form of Non-violence; however, I was always grappling with how to make sense of such awareness. *What did it mean to be truly non-violent?*

Catou loved telling stories about her past, as most older people who have lived interesting lives would. I listened to stories of her days as a lefty communist journalist and was completely enamored of the richness of her history, all seemingly evident in the creases around her eyes and the countless gray hairs strewn haphazardly about her face. As I sat next to my godmother at the long wooden dining table with other family friends, Catou looked at me adoringly and asked as she hunched her back, “So little one, what would you like to know?”

“What I really want to know, Catou, is how does communism

affect your life choices?" I thought my question was simple enough, but she looked a bit confused and asked in French for clarification. "I mean, how do your politics affect your life? How you see things, how you treat people? That kind of thing." I repeated myself again. Catou banged her fists on the wooden table to emphasize her point, and while pursing her lips exclaimed, "Communism is about economic justice! I believe in economic justice! That's enough." I nodded in agreement, but began pressing her more – "How does that inform your daily life, though? Does it affect how you spend? Whom you employ?" She did not seem to understand my question, and her answer did not satisfy me.

That unanswered question was perhaps one of the most unassuming, yet deeply resonant questions I have posed. Of what use were principles if they were not applied, I thought. Political ideologies are often intimately connected with people's public identities, but less often with the fundamental ways in which they live. Catou's inability to articulate how her political commitments informed her daily living was testament to the important role of communism in her public persona, but it also elucidated how that public identity and her lived reality diverged. For her, the political was not fully personal, and I began seeing the irony of the life-size Lenin cutout in Catou's foyer. I was reminded of the mass production of Palestinian *kafiyehs*, co-opted by young people who want to appear chicly concerned through faux political statements – the profundity of which they had little grasp. Could such a symbol of principle be reduced to decoration? Are bumper stickers on our cars really enough? Political stances and their connotations are often used to categorize types of people, but these symbolic statements are not always reflective of the ethics of daily choice.

Startled by Catou's silent confession of inconsistency, reflective of so many other people's experiences, I began to interrogate more

diligently my own ethical commitments. Over the following five years or so, my political allegiances shifted gradually from categories of communist/socialist to the subaltern, and “Gandhian.” I emerged even more fervently concerned with global inequalities, and more strongly committed to the integration of my political and personal aspirations. I saw Gandhian perspectives as principles that enabled me to articulate an increased consciousness of people and ideas that live in the margins. I became more sensitive to and incensed by human-created inequalities, such as shanty towns on the sides of Indian roads, or stories of single mothers on food stamps.

My academic inquiry into inequality found a natural partnership with India. In the summer after my freshman year of college, I packed my suitcases, took my anti-malarial pills, and shipped myself off to India. “What for?” people asked. “To learn how I can best be an agent for social change,” was my naive reply. I had become a voracious consumer of information about inequality and human rights, and developed an earnest desire to *do something* tangible that went beyond mere analysis, and that viewed working toward the common good as a fundamental duty and obligation, not an act of occasional charity. I went to India with all the missionary zeal of a Gandhian, but returned, to my chagrin, somewhat unsuccessful, disappointed, and disillusioned. As countless other well-intentioned people had done, I came home with intellectual constructs that did not quite translate beyond the realm of ideas.

For years, Gandhi’s legacy has been a central reference point for me, a talisman for reminding myself of my own political, ethical, and spiritual convictions. His life of sacrifice, discipline, and asceticism was something I deeply revered, as it was a direct application of his core principles in all the realms of his life – not just the intellectual and political. His example of simplicity, and

the iconic image of him in a loincloth with a bamboo walking stick reverberated in my mind as I went to pay my respects at his ashram by the banks of the Sabarmati River in Ahmedabad, India.

I walked cautiously and with the utmost sense of urgency. I wanted to feel deeply the strength of Gandhi's conviction, which had come to inform so many of my own principles and beliefs. I stepped into a bare room in which the only remaining belongings of his existed. In a small glass case, there were his round spectacles, a pair of slippers, his walking cane, a pen, a bowl, a spinning wheel, and a few other small personal belongings. Tears welled in my eyes, and my father put his arm around me, silently acknowledging what that moment must have meant to me. What I soon realized, however, was that I was not so much moved by Gandhi's simplicity, as I was upset by my own act of voyeurism. I was a tourist, prepared with a digital camera in my bag and arriving in an air-conditioned car. Was I, just like the token communists or countless others, donning an identity, hoping to be transformed by it without doing the necessary work to fundamentally transform myself?

Intellectual commitments are fundamentally different from lived realities, and are just a preliminary movement towards living a life led by principle. I did not live my life as a Gandhian would, nor did Catou live hers as a communist, committed to economic justice. I realized that my unwillingness to give up all worldly possessions and not require certain material standards did not necessarily make me less conscious of Gandhi's ideals, however, it meant that I was not prepared to live them the way he did. My peers, who would often dress in *keffiyehs*, or decorate their backpacks with radical slogans, did not seem to live as radically as those slogans mandated. Rather, all these symbols were reflective of imagined ideologies and identities left unrealized. Did

the differences between our politics and our actual lives mean that we experienced cognitive dissonance? There is a difference between living in accordance with principles and simply identifying under their categorizations.

Just as I had seen the limitations in Catou's assertion of a communist identity, I located within my own self a similar inability to live as sensitively to forms of inequality. My inability to live following a model of conviction did not mean that I did not have deeply held principles; it just meant that my own synthesis of principled living helped me arrive at a place that was different from Gandhi's. Perhaps there is no single way to live an engaged and consistent life; there are as many paths as there are people.

As I stood in front of that glass display case holding Gandhi's simple belongings, I remembered an expression that my godmother's friend, Bichette, had shared with me in France. It roughly translated as: *I do not display in the store window anything that is not in the store.* I had not been able to make much sense of the words when I first heard them, but they grew heavy in my mind. Bichette's words urged me to rethink the definition of my politics and ethics in their neat and pre-packaged categories or affiliations, and to interrogate the extent to which I lived according to my convictions. Maybe Gandhi was the only *authentic* Gandhian, and Lenin the only *real* Leninist. Ultimately, even though I am not able to live as Gandhi, I challenge myself to think through and translate his ideas into my own conscious living – the culmination of which is presented in *Thinking Through Gandhi*. Engaging with the principles of Non-violence and truth is more about aspiring to live by certain convictions than assuming dogmas that limit how we think of ourselves, because it is in those aspirations that we witness our own transformation.

Notes

- 1 *CWMG 96: 311. August, 1947.*
- 2 *"Speeches and Sounds - Martin Luther King, Jr. - A Proper Sense of Priorities." African-American Involvement in the Vietnam War.<http://www.aavw.org/special_features/speeches_speech_king04.html>.*



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his office in Atlanta, 1966.

2

Why Gandhi Matters

I was twelve years old when I read Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, and his message and life experiments eventually and irrevocably transformed my thinking. In the thirteen years since this discovery, my relationship with 'Gandhian' thought has continued to develop, and my respect for his life example and commitment to living according to the values he embodied has evolved into a personal life mission.

Gandhi's principles can be used as tools that guide us to *think* differently. The convictions he held are far larger than his persona, and this work examines the ideas that Gandhi put forth, rather than the events or historical context from which he arose. The impetus for this project does not emanate from a preoccupation with his personality, but from the potential power of his conviction and the strength of his ideas. Most importantly, my essays are inspired by a desire to extend *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha* (insistence on truth, or soul force) beyond historical and theoretical studies into the ethical arsenals of people who are hungry for social change.

We live in a time that is ripe for a renewed radicalism. From the Arab Spring to Occupy movements,

mass political action has been highlighting our generalized sense of injustice. I am alarmed by the general climate of tension and violence that colors much of international and domestic politics. Rising death tolls in America's wars in the Middle East have become news events of the past, and the political discourse in the country seems to be devolving into polarized rhetoric more and more. No nation in the international community seems to be innocent of human rights violations that threaten democratic integrity; and the global economic crisis is exacerbating the divide between people who have the power to make decisions and those who must endure the imposed consequences of these choices. Over the past five thousand years, there have been no substantial periods of peace in the entire world; at any given moment, there has been at least one region or the other engaged in physical violence.¹ Although we share the desire for peace, it remains an illusory aspiration — both within ourselves and in our communities.

As a young idealist, I have often been in danger of losing my sense of purpose when the culture of violence predominates, seeming to delegitimize non-violence in a world of nuclear weapons, menacing guns and mechanized killing, and deeply entrenched inequality. Amidst such expressions of skepticism, I remember Gandhi's resonant affirmation:

When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the

end they always fall. Think of it —
always.

In this way, Gandhi's legacy of principle in action offers an optimistic path for people who are personally committed to creating peace through non-violence. His message inspires by reaffirming the fundamental goodness of man, which was his inviolate belief. My hope is that *Thinking Through Gandhi* will serve as a primer for those who are committed not only to grasping the principle of non-violence, but also to utilizing it in everyday life. In my own study of Gandhi, I have encountered numerous academic works that have offered thorough analysis of his thought, but few that have confronted the most salient question: *How does Gandhi still matter?*

Since Gandhi's death in 1948, the global community, and South Asia in particular, has been afflicted by countless instances of political violence and unrest. War and mass violence have become grave spectacles upon which we tend to comment, but rarely confront in non-abstract ways. Partition in 1947 marked one of the greatest losses of human life in the Indian subcontinent's history and the largest exodus of people in the 20th century. The enmity between Hindu and Muslim communities, the eradication of which was a life-long commitment for Gandhi, extended beyond the literal 'Line of Control.' This ongoing tension often continues to shape the political relations between India and Pakistan: two nuclear nations, both confronting important development and national security risks.

In the more than 65 years since Gandhi's death, his

popular memory as an iconic proponent of peace is often evoked, but it rarely serves as an active voice for non-violence in our politics, or in our own living. In the wake of political and personal violence, the question, “What would Gandhi have done?” continually re-emerges; this question places undue emphasis on predicting Gandhi’s actions, rather than mining his principles for application in present-day circumstances.

The historical moment in which Gandhi acted was particular, but the cornerstones of his ideology — *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satya* (truth) — remain universal. If Gandhi’s example possesses any activist relevance, we need to re-direct the question from what Gandhi would do to *what we must do*. In his own words, “As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world — that is the myth of the atomic age — as in being able to remake ourselves.” The heart of Gandhi’s ideas was concerned with evolving the Self; affecting the larger community is a natural outcome of personal transformation.

After Gandhi’s death, Albert Einstein wrote to Nehru, mourning Gandhi’s assassination. He noted the nearly parallel progression of Gandhi’s methodology of non-violent resistance with the development of the atom bomb. These two historical moments were coeval to the point where Gandhi’s “Quit India” movement in August 1942 coincided almost exactly with the development of the atom bomb.² These antithetical developments infused a new urgency into re-defining the meaning of Gandhi’s non-violence. At a global conference in 1968, Carlos

Romulo, former president of the United Nations General Assembly, articulated this need for the global community:

I would think that the world today has no other choice but to move towards the very simplicity and directness and truth of Gandhi's principle. The resurgence of will in the international community, expressed by the awakening of people previously subjugated, by citizens traditionally coerced by the so-called rule of law, and by the youth all over the world, has but one message to the contemporary consciousness: that solidarity could yet be presented by men, with no means to enforce their will but the moral force of their number and status in society, against the policies of governments that tend to divide rather than integrate, the family of man.³

Though many proponents of peace since Gandhi have looked towards his example for its political significance, few have promoted Gandhi's message for the individual seeking to live nonviolently. *Thinking Through Gandhi* expands upon the political meanings of Gandhi's message by re-focusing concern on non-violent living and the central role of individual and personal perspectives.

One of the more powerful ideas that Gandhi's legacy has conferred on me is the confidence to reject the notion

of “Gandhian” ideas or “Gandhism.” That is to say, we should revere Gandhi’s example, but not make it a religion. “Gandhism” provides limited relevance, as it stands only to reconnect with a bygone moment and create a trope out of Gandhi’s ideas. For this reason, I make a conscious point to avoid using the term, “Gandhian.” Many scholars have reminded us that Gandhi was one of the most celebrated proponents of *ahimsa*, but not its original author. I would go even further to argue that no one can author principles as deep as Gandhi’s — we can only live them. The ancient term for Hinduism, *Sanatana Dharma* (eternal values) implies temporally transcendent beliefs. Similarly, *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) extend beyond any particular historical moment.

Though Gandhi’s core principles of non-violence and self-reliance remained steadfast throughout his life, his thought was continually evolving, progressing, and even contradicting itself. The radical and incendiary implications of his first major political treatise, *Hind Swaraj* (1909), gave way to more mainstream, inclusive rhetoric towards the end of his life. Like the Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, who claimed, “With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do,” Gandhi chose change and self-evaluation over static ideology. Gandhi re-thought his stances on a number of topics, such as the West, its modernity, Hindu-Muslim relations, the role of women, and social exclusion in relation to caste.

Gandhi’s willingness to experiment with social reform and his questioning of accepted ideas demonstrates the

need and possibility of evolving one's perspective, albeit not at the expense of one's greater vision. In this sense, non-violent resistance through *satyagraha* (insistence on truth or soul-force) is not just a methodology, but a core principle:

In *satyagraha*, there is always unflinching adherence to truth. It is never to be forsaken on any account. Even for the sake of one's country, it does not permit resort to falsehood. It proceeds on the assumption of the ultimate triumph of truth. A *satyagrahi* does not abandon his path, even though at times it seems impenetrable and beset with difficulties and dangers...

Gandhi's adherence to *satyagraha* presents a clear articulation of his method. It was the development of this overarching ideology that remains his most meaningful contribution to intellectual thought.

In the extensive literature on Gandhi, he is portrayed mainly in two distinct roles: saint and politician. I understand Gandhi primarily as an intellectual. His religiosity and political goals were integral to who he was, but it was fundamentally his ideology — a synthesis of spiritual and moral thought — that makes him relevant today, his ideas serving as a tool through which we can creatively think about ethical issues. The articulation of an ideology is inherently tied to moral pursuit, as sociologist Edward Shils elaborates:

Ideology, whether nominally religious or antireligious, is concerned with the sacred. Ideology seeks to sanctify existence by bringing every part of it under the dominion of the ultimately right principles. The sacred and the sacrilegious reside in authority, the former in the authority acknowledged by ideology, the latter in that which prevails in the 'wicked world', against which ideology contends.⁵

In this way, our aim should be to give cohesive meaning to a body of principles, as it is this endeavor that brings us closer to achieving authority over ourselves and our actions.

Just as Edward Shils elaborates on the intellectual's articulation of a given ideology, Edward Said, in his 1993 series of essays, *Representations of the Intellectual*, explores the social role of the public intellectual in the midst of the increasing professionalization of knowledge production. Said presents Julien Benda's and Antonio Gramsci's differing perspectives of the intellectual. For Benda, the intellectual is a member of a select group that is removed from the material aims of society. Gramsci, however, defines the intellectual as anyone who produces and distributes specific forms of knowledge. While Benda argues that an intellectual is someone who grapples from a removed distance with the way society *is*, Gramsci views the intellectual as fulfilling a specific professional role — one with a highly specialized, even technical knowledge. Most importantly, Said notes,

Gramsci views the intellectual as integral to the basic functions of society.

Said extends Gramsci's idea of the social utility of the intellectual from someone who articulates a viewpoint to a person whose views have specific social aims. As Said notes, "There has been no major revolution in modern history without intellectuals; conversely there has been no major counter-revolutionary movement without intellectuals. Intellectuals have been the fathers and mothers of movements..."⁶ His concept of the intellectual embodies Gandhi's contribution as a thinker, committed to social justice and social reforms:

The intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them)...and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug.⁷

Conceiving of the intellectual as representative of a deliberate social stance enables an important re-thinking of Gandhi as a persuasive thinker. The ability to challenge

existing social norms requires a conscious distance from the conditions out of which orthodoxy or injustice arises. Gandhi's perspective from the periphery and his identification with marginalized groups was integral to his personal quest for Truth. Sociologist C. Wright Mills articulates the need for such a distance:

The independent artist and intellectual are among the few remaining personalities equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely living things. Fresh perception now involves the capacity to continually unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communications [i. e. modern systems of representation] swamp us. These worlds of mass-art and mass-thought are increasingly geared to the demands of politics. That is why it is in politics that intellectual solidarity and effort must be centered. If the thinker does not relate himself to the value of truth in political struggle, he cannot responsibly cope with the whole of live experience.

Just as Said and Wright emphasized the political, Gandhi understood that there is no escaping political involvement for an active seeker of Truth:

To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be

able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics, and I can say without the slightest hesitation, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.⁹

Gandhi's identification with the marginalized cannot be overstated; it was reflected in his active vow of poverty and in his sensitivity to voices of communities that remained largely unheard. This personal assumption of subaltern status reflects Said's mission of intellectualism as a standpoint that does not theorize from afar, but rather is earnestly involved in the realm of action. Gandhi's potent synthesis of intellectual ideology with activist zeal reflects the need for a public intellectual to be a person of conviction, who must always exist slightly on the periphery of accepted thought by maintaining an "athletic rational energy."¹⁰

* * *

A number of people have asked whether I intend only to praise Gandhi, or whether I plan to include critique. This question may not be applicable to my project; my work is less concerned with Gandhi as a political or historical figure and is more focused on Gandhi's ideas as they apply to current living. I am sympathetic to and passionate about what Gandhi

represents — his ideological and personal limitations included. Nonetheless, no project about ideas can simply eulogize or canonize. I aspire to maintain a personal voice and an objectivity that Gandhi himself may have supported. From my perspective, Gandhi's thought is most meaningful as a tool through which we can think and live better lives, rather than as a political ideology that is primarily analyzed, interrogated, and often, mindlessly replicated. Ahimsa (non-violence) and satya (truth) are meant to be creatively adapted, and it is this emphasis on application that *Thinking Through Gandhi* explores.

Just as Gandhi believed that theory is secondary to praxis, I am committed to extending his thought trajectory, which fundamentally focused on transforming, rather than exclusively interpreting. That said, a basic contextualization and understanding of Gandhi's principles are a *sine qua non* to building upon his thinking. To this end, each of the essays will provide definition and background for the main ideas before extending them to application to current circumstances.

An exploration of Gandhi's principles cannot just be academic; the strength of his message is far too powerful, and our urgent need for a renewed non-violence demands more than mere study. As the American translator of Gandhi's message, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., warned, "It is no longer a choice between violence and non-violence...it's non-violence or non-existence." Gandhi's example conveys the importance of a radical perspective and allows us to reinvigorate conversations about nonviolent living. He, perhaps more than any other iconic

figure, demonstrates the necessity of fully living one's convictions, even if commitment to these ideas does not readily beget positive results. This intensity of principled living was the reason for Gandhi's success, and it must continue to inspire. The commitment to non-violent living needs to be visceral, not just intellectual, and I sincerely hope that this project contributes to such a rethinking of *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence).

Plan of the Book

In keeping with the central motivation to understand how Gandhi's principles can continue to inspire, these seven essays focus on a few key aspects of Gandhi's ideology and practice, while offering ways that these ideas can be applied in personal and community life. Most of the essays explore key relational concepts, such as means and ends, rights and duty, love and power, universalism and localism, to cite a few. This list is indicative of the ways in which Gandhi's ideas are fluid; many of the cornerstone principles are deeply interconnected. For example, adherence to complete *ahimsa* is wholly contingent on Gandhi's concept of Truth, which in turn is predicated on his belief in the synonymy of Truth and God. The methodology that satyagraha (insistence on truth) offers is constructed on the concepts of *ahimsa* and *satya*, as is Gandhi's vision of *swaraj* (literally, self-rule). In this sense, it is difficult to explore one concept without mention of another, as they are all centrally cohesive elements in Gandhi's thinking. What fundamentally connects these concepts, however, is the

commitment to principled living, which will be a continual theme throughout the various essays.

For Gandhi, means and ends were convertible terms, and the third essay, “Methods Matter: Gandhi’s Means and Ends Principle and the Necessity for Non-violent Action,” explores how non-violence is indispensable, given this conviction. The discussion of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* (insistence on truth) in the first essay provides not only a foundation to understand Gandhi’s ideas of non-violence, but also ways to begin thinking about the difference between passive resistance and active non-violence in the setting of current affairs and in interpersonal relationships. The necessity for the means to be in accordance with the desired ends echoes the reality that peace cannot be achieved through violence; injustice cannot engender justice. Additionally, this formulation of the synonymy of means and ends can lead to a reconceptualization of power — in Gandhi’s terms, love is the ultimate source of power.

The fourth essay, “Love as Power: Empowerment and Cultivating Love Within Ourselves,” focuses on this redefinition of love as a source of power in both politics and interpersonal relationships. The love-based approach of *satyagraha* is instrumental in inspiring courage as well as a personal creative potential. Gandhi’s faith in love is integral to elevating the principle of human relatedness, which goes hand in hand with an adherence to total non-violence. Love needs to be more than a personal, sentimental value; it needs to become a legitimate basis for ethical decision-making.

“Gandhi as Rebel” Defiance in Hind Swaraj.” is the

fifth essay and centers on *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi's first seminal treatise and one of his most interesting statements on cultural and political selfhood. Gandhi saw this first, major political study as a re-examination of the meaning of *swaraj* (self-rule), the attainment of which became his life-long mission. This essay looks at Gandhi's vision of *swaraj* and also seeks to understand the significance of its radical undertones. What is the role of a radical in social change? Why was it important that Gandhi began his political career with such a counter-establishment tract? This essay explores the need for radical experimentation in social movements and the ways in which Gandhi's method presented such an example.

Deep-seated conviction is at the core of every radical reformer. Gandhi's example was most significant in that it was an example of principle in action. The sixth essay, "Ethical Eating: Vegetarianism and Ahimsa as Lifestyle," explores the role of conviction in Gandhi's leadership by looking at vegetarianism as an ethical life choice. One of the clearest and most important manifestations of Gandhi's conviction in total *ahimsa* (non-violence) was his commitment to vegetarianism. His adherence to and strong advocacy for a vegetarian lifestyle was not just a tangential eccentricity; it reflected his commitment to holistic, principled living and serves as a reminder of the need to make conscious choices on a daily basis, while widening our circle of compassion.

Just as Gandhi's message of non-violence applies to daily choices, it extends to his vision of political community. The idea of social exclusion relates to

Gandhi's construction of the nation-state, an entity that in itself offers opposition or exclusion to those not encompassed within its geographical delineation. This relationship across borders is the primary focus of the seventh essay. Though Gandhi admired the idea of global citizenship, he nonetheless believed asserting nationhood would be India's way to gain political legitimacy. Rabindranath Tagore, poet laureate of India and an important interlocutor of Gandhi's, however, felt that aspiring to nationhood would be accepting a Western artifact. Tagore, instead argued for a more cosmopolitan standpoint. Gandhi and Tagore's conversations concerning the exclusivity of the nation-state illuminate how we can re-think what it means to be a citizen, a nationalist, and a dissenter. Their larger shared vision of global citizenship, and their dissenting views on ideal political community, can help us infuse nuance and meaning into conversations about nationalism, which implicitly center around ideological forms of violence.

Gandhi's conviction in *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) parallel his view of human rights. The final essay, "Rights and Duty: Towards Claiming Responsibility," offers a discussion on the relationship between rights and duty. Gandhi emphasized people's duties as more important than their individual rights, and he strongly believed that we can acquire rights only out of the fulfillment of duties. The discussion of the relationship between rights and duties lends itself to a larger conversation about service — a fundamental obligation, according to Gandhi. I relate Gandhi's notion of duty to the Hindu tenet of *karmayoga*, a spiritual path

that emphasizes action as a means to enlightenment and divine knowledge. This essay also goes beyond a theoretical conversation regarding rights and duties to Gandhi's specific articulation of human rights. A great deal of Gandhi's methodology and vocabulary was spiritually derived, and I discuss the ways in which Gandhi's spirituality greatly influenced his human rights ideology.

Notes

- 1 The War Scholar. 27 Apr. 2010 <<http://www.warscholar.com/Timeline.html>>.
- 2 Nanda, B. R. *In Search of Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2002. 249.
- 3 *Proc. of Truth and Non-violence in Gandhi's Humanism*, Paris. New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation on Behalf of Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO, 1970. 323-24.
- 4 CWMG 14: 63, November 3, 1917.
- 5 Edward Shils, 'Ideology' in *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Macmillan and Free Press: New York, 1968, Vol. 7, pp 66-76. As quoted in Dalton, Dennis. "Gandhi: Ideology and Authority." *Modern Asian Studies* 3. 4 (1969): 377-93.
- 6 Said, Edward W. *Representations of the Intellectual*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996. 10-11. Print.
- 7 Said, 11
- 8 C. Wright Mills, *Power, politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*. New York Ballantine, 1963. 299 as quoted in Edward Said, 21
- 9 Gandhi, and Mahadev H. Desai. *An Autobiography, Or, The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan House, 2005. 615. Print
- 10 Said, 23



Gandhi spinning khadi cloth

3

Methods Matter

Gandhi's Means and Ends Principle and the Necessity for Non-violent Action

*"Means and ends are convertible in my philosophy of life. They say 'means are after all, means.' I would say 'means are after all, everything.' As the means, so the end. "*¹

- Mahatma Gandhi, 1937

In the framework of Gandhi's thought, all principles are templates for direct action; Gandhi's ideology is a coherent synthesis of faith, conviction, and applied method. At the center of his principles is a fundamental adherence to Truth, which guided not only the vision of *swaraj* (self-rule), but also the methods of its attainment. For Gandhi, the practice of *ahimsa* was at its essence the practice of truthfulness, and his methodology — *satyagraha* (insistence on truth or soul-force) and non-violent non-cooperation — was the most

morally evolved means to attain *swaraj*, a state of freedom that is simultaneously personal, political, and spiritual. The near synonymy of means and ends reflects the profound degree to which Gandhi aspired to an ideology that was fully integrated in terms of purpose and practice. The vision was the method.

The means and ends principle is in itself a cohesive ideology, and is predicated on the notion that truth and life are fundamentally integrated. Gandhi understood that the well-being of all is integral to the well-being of the individual. His Holiness the Dalai Lama echoes this sentiment in his assertion that the happiness of those around us is essential to our own. This idea becomes apparent when thinking about relations between family members; however, the same element of interrelatedness can exist among neighbors and communities. Gandhi saw human beings as interrelated on the individual level, and this degree of connection radiated out to all spheres of human functioning — including social justice, economic justice, and politics. The individual, community, and family are therefore not only deeply connected, but in fact, reliant upon one another.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama illustrates that our personal happiness hinges on our connectedness, while also connecting modern technology's push to make us increasingly independent with our subsequent disregard for each others' happiness; if we do not think we *require* each other, then the compulsion to act ethically towards each other is less strong. Utilizing machines to perform tasks as mundane as cooking or commuting has meant that we can do more without the assistance of others.

This development, in turn, “can cause us to lose touch with the wider reality of human experience, and in particular, our dependence on each other.”² In this sense, the less we rely on each other, the more disinterested we are in the mutuality of our happiness.

While the multiple domains of political and community life are tied together, Gandhi’s notion of *swaraj* (self-rule) maintains that human beings have a need to be self-regulating, as well. This personal *swaraj* holds profound normative and spiritual meaning, and the value of human connectedness naturally lends itself to the belief that violence against an opponent translates into violence against oneself. Denying an adversary respect is denying oneself that same dignity, and oppressing another is ultimately inflicting the same great moral harm on oneself. In this way, Gandhi’s means and ends principle brings together the totality of his thought, as it encompasses righteous thought and action for both self and society. Additionally, it establishes the idea that societal issues and reforms are deeply connected to the reforming of individuals, and that all these changes are ultimately rooted in shifts in moral and spiritual attitudes. As Petra Kelly, founder of the first German Green Party, reminds us, “We cannot solve any political problem without also addressing spiritual ones.” In this essay, I explore the intimate relationship between means and ends and the most pressing question that arises from this relationship: *Why non-violence?*

Ahimsa as an Essential Principle

For Gandhi, non-violence was a non-negotiable tenet.

It was not just the tactic he employed to gain Indian independence, but also represented an ultimate ideological goal. Oftentimes when we discuss non-violence in contemporary contexts, we think of it only as a method to achieve a specific result. Perhaps we pose questions such as, "How should non-violence be applied in the cause for Palestinian self-determination?" Or, "How can non-violent, anti-war protests against big governments affect foreign policy?" While these types of questions are important steps towards incorporating non-violence in our approach to these issues, they employ non-violence as a strategy rather than regard it as a final point of arrival. Not only can this outlook undermine non-violence's transformative power, but it disregards the spirit of non-violent action, which is most powerful when it seeks to transform our attitudes.

Gandhi's belief in *ahimsa* was unshakeable primarily because it was a direct and absolute manifestation of his spiritual faith. His frequent dictum, "Truth is God" encapsulates the primacy of truthful means for him. *The Bhagavad Gita*, considered to contain the essence of Hindu spirituality, was arguably the main influence in shaping Gandhi's spiritual and moral ideas. One of the central principles of the *Gita* is the duty to pursue selfless, disinterested action. This is not to say that one should be nihilistic or apathetic, but rather that one's emphasis should be placed primarily on duties, not on anticipating the benefits derived from performing those duties. Gandhi held on to this notion of detached and courageous action, which was deeply connected to his emphasis on cultivating self-discipline. This detachment

accomplishes two important things: it directs the focus of action on the means, increasing an individual's consciousness of their methods, and second, it inspires fearlessness by conceiving a nearly insignificant potential outcome relative to the motivation for action.

Understanding the Meaning of Swaraj

Because Gandhi's methodology was nearly synonymous with the vision he sought to realize, it is essential to establish an understanding of his goals. Gandhi's vision of political self-determination and personal progress are best conveyed by the concept of *swaraj*. *Swaraj*, from the Sanskrit "swa" meaning self and "raj" meaning rule, literally means self-rule or independence, and also conveys deeply personal implications of self-hood and self-possession. The interrelatedness of self and society is best captured in the multidimensional perspective of *swaraj* that envisions freedom as a continuum that includes individual, local community, nation, and global community. For Gandhi, the aim could not be for Indian independence alone; it had to be inclusive of a more expansive moral cultivation: "I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke," he said. "I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever...Hence for me the movement of *swaraj* is a movement of self-purification."³ Gandhi's non-cooperation movement against British rule was accompanied by vigorous campaigns to reform Indian society, culture, and religion from within. He strongly believed that Hindu-Muslim unity, the removal of

untouchability, and the alleviation of poverty were necessary antecedents to *swaraj*. This holistic vision of freedom was absolutely crucial to his reliance on *ahimsa* (non-violence); the moral and spiritual presuppositions of freedom necessitated equally moral methods.

Active Ahimsa

Though *ahimsa* literally means an “absence of violence,” Gandhi argued that *ahimsa* meant and required far more than simple non-injury. “In its positive form,” he explained, “*ahimsa* means the largest love, the greatest charity.”⁴ *Ahimsa* was not just the building block for his method, it was his utmost principle, equivalent to the highest form of Truth: “*Ahimsa* is my God, and Truth is my God.”⁵ By integrating the deepest conviction of Truth into both process and outcome, Gandhi achieved a kind of encompassing moral power — something that Martin Luther King Jr. would later respect as the source of Gandhi’s moral highground. King, too, understood and upheld a strong adherence to truthfulness in methodology, as he believed that the means inherently affect the ends, famously saying, “Constructive ends can never give absolute moral justification to destructive means, because in the final analysis the end is preexistent in the means.”⁶

Gandhi viewed *ahimsa* as a comprehensive ethical guide that required total non-violence in thought and action, and whose use extended far beyond the political. His practice of *ahimsa* (non-violence) emanated from an ideology that required compassion and sensitivity, and that was predicated on the interconnectedness of the human family. His precept of total human relatedness is

communicated by the Sanskrit phrase — from the Upanishads — *Vasudhaiva Katumbakam*, “The whole world is one single family.” For Gandhi, this tenet required no reasoning or argument. Its resonant meaning represents what most of us inherently know and realize today — we are all more similar than we are different.

Non-violent action is a natural outcome of abiding by the abovementioned principle of unity and respect for all life. Perpetrating violence of any kind — physical or otherwise — on another is therefore predicated on a disregard for common humanity and the creation of an “other.” That is, we can ignore another’s humanity only when we perceive him to be intrinsically different than ourselves. Frederik Streng uses developmental psychologist Eric Erikson’s study of Gandhi to highlight the relationship between self and other in the scheme of Gandhi’s ideas:

Gandhi, claims Erikson, by recognizing all men— not just one’s friends — as human beings gave back the opponent his dignity and thus his strength to accept himself as an agent of change. This means that man can and does face himself in others, and defines others in relation to himself. The truth about oneself is never separated from one’s relationship with others.⁷

Such an active redefinition of how people are related to one another is at the crux of *satyagraha* (insistence on truth).

As a strong faith in human “oneness” was central to Gandhi’s ideas, so too was the importance of consistent and principled action. To him, *ahimsa* (non-violence) needed to be practised actively, at all times. Gandhi did not see the practitioner of non-violence as taking the occasional day off. He emphasized the importance of complete non-violence in all spheres of life:

Did I speak harshly today to any co-worker? Did I give him inferior khadi [homespun cloth] and keep better khadi for myself? . . . Did I neglect serving the neighbor who was ill today? Did I refuse water to a thirsty passer-by who asked for it? Did I not care even to greet the guest who had arrived? ... Did I get angry in the kitchen because the rice was half cooked? All these are forms of intense violence. If we do not observe *ahimsa* spontaneously in such daily acts, we shall never learn to observe it in other fields.⁸

Even in the most mundane occurrences, the values that underlie non-violent living must shape our attitudes and our actions. In fact, Gandhi would argue that it is in the quotidian moments that such truthfulness is most indispensable to attain personal spiritual growth — *swaraj* (self-rule). Consistent application is a fundamental tenet of *ahimsa*; the practice is the theory.

Defining Satyagraha

To further this discussion of means and ends, we must have a full understanding of the various dimensions of *satyagraha* (insistence on truth) — Gandhi's method of *ahimsa* (non-violence) put into action. *Satyagraha* was Gandhi's articulation of resistance, and in understanding its profound meanings, we begin to see why the means are, as Gandhi said, "everything." *Satyagraha* derives from the Sanskrit words *sat*, meaning "that which is," or "truth," and *agraha*, meaning insistence — for a combined literal meaning of "insistence on truth." The word can also be interpreted as "truth-force" or "soul-force." As Gandhi explained, "*Satyagraha* is pure soul-force. Truth is the very substance of the soul. That is why this force is called *satyagraha*. The soul is informed with knowledge. In it burns the flame of love. If someone gives us pain through ignorance, we shall win him through love."⁹ *Satyagraha*, is simultaneously based on, and in search of, truth.

A fundamental requirement of *satyagraha* is that the practitioner not inflict harm on another, yet be ready to endure it. It requires a willingness to risk injury, suffer negative consequences, even lose one's life, while maintaining the strength to refrain from inflicting this on one's opponent. Gandhi firmly believed that this principle of sacrifice held a greater power than aggression: "Self-sacrifice of one innocent man is a million times more potent than the sacrifice of a million men who die in the act of killing others. The willing sacrifice of the innocent is the most powerful retort to insolent

tyranny that has yet been conceived by God or man.”¹⁰ The readiness to sacrifice and to suffer makes *satyagraha* an attribute of strength; its success derives from the redemptive power of suffering. The aim is to elicit a human response from one’s oppressor, or from those who simply bear witness, by exposing injustice through selfless suffering. Gandhi’s ideal of *swaraj* centered on self-discipline, restraint, and a deep self-awareness that enabled a process of self-purification. In this way, *satyagraha* was a path towards spiritual and moral elevation as well:

They cannot make him do anything against his will. And this is the consummation of *swaraj*, because it means complete independence. It need not be assumed that such resistance is possible against only civilized rulers. Even a heart of flint will melt in the fire kindled by the power of the soul...This is no exaggeration. It is as true as an algebraic equation...Even as the eyelashes automatically protect the eyes, so does *satyagraha*, when kindled, automatically protect the freedom of the soul.¹¹

The use of *satyagraha* therefore presupposes two things. First, it assumes that everyone has the power and ability to change — even those who perpetrate the worst forms of violence. This assumption is largely predicated on Gandhi’s belief, or hope really, that people are essentially good. As he affirmed, “There is humanity

even in the most wicked.”¹² The second assumption of *satyagraha* is that the oppressor and the oppressed, belonging to a common human family, are intimately related through the process of subjugation. Colonial rule, for example, is seen as harmful and debilitating for both colonizer and colonized because in taking away another’s dignity, the oppressor denies his own. In this sense, Gandhi viewed *swaraj* for India as a harbinger of moral progress for the British as well, freeing them from the imprisonment of their own injustice.

Satyagraha in Action

The most meaningful way to grasp how *satyagraha* can be effectively applied today is to understand the ways Gandhi put it into action during his lifetime. The method’s moral force is perhaps nowhere better seen than during his 1947 fast in Calcutta (Kolkatta). His fast was a targeted response to communal violence in West Bengal on the eve of Indian independence, the Partition of India, and the consequent creation of West and East Pakistan. The communal violence that overtook the area lasted more than a year and was referred to by some as “The Terror.”¹³ Throughout this violent period, Gandhi continued to advocate for Hindu-Muslim unity, stating, “heart unity is more important than political boundaries.”¹⁴

The Great Calcutta Killing was a moment of tremendous violence in which more than 4,000 people were killed in a four-day period in mid-August. Professor Dennis Dalton, in his analysis of Gandhi’s fast, cites one bystander’s frightened reflection of the horrors:

It was a moment of terror that I never imagined could happen here. I saw the city I loved, the neighbors I trusted, desecrate themselves in a terrible fury unknown before in Calcutta. Those few days of bloodshed proved to me that *swaraj* had to be a lot more difficult and distant than we thought.¹⁵

The Indian nationalist movement had gained political independence, but the bloody civil war that came in its place deeply saddened Gandhi, who insisted that he had not achieved *swaraj* and had “his head hung in shame at this recital of man’s barbarism.”¹⁶ The violence that erupted between Hindus and Muslims — people who had been neighbours just days before— diminished the progress that Gandhi had strived to make through his non-cooperation movement. The enlightened state of moral and spiritual liberation that he sought on a national level was highly contingent on Hindu-Muslim unity, a cause that he vehemently fought for, and equated with *swaraj*.

In response to this widespread Hindu-Muslim violence, Gandhi felt that his *practice* of *satyagraha* was imperfect, rather than that *satyagraha* itself had failed, as he discussed in a talk on August 20, 1947:

He confessed that it had become clear to him that what he had mistaken for *satyagraha* was not *satyagraha* but passive resistance—a weapon of the weak. Indians harboured ill-will and anger against their rulers, while they

pretended to resist them non-violently. Their resistance was, therefore, inspired by violence and not by a regard for the man in the British, whom they should convert through *satyagraha*.¹⁷

This sentiment emphasized the complete adherence to *ahimsa* that is required for *satyagraha*. Even feeling hatred or ill-will for an adversary is a potent manifestation of violence. For this reason, Gandhi believed that Indians had adopted non-violent means, but not non-violent attitudes.

Gandhi believed that his fasting would force people to examine their own actions, and that his suffering would inspire people to reconsider their behaviour. On September 2, 1947, he began his fast with this earnest hope. The impetus for personal re-evaluation that arises from *satyagraha* is apparent in the first hand account of Amita Chakravarty, who was at the time a teacher in Calcutta.

Even while repudiating his method and its efficacy, the one question in peoples' minds would be, 'How is Gandhiji?' People would begin to feel uncomfortable; the grocer's boy, the rickshaw puller, the office clerk, the school and college students would scan the news columns early in the morning and listen to the radio throughout the day and feel more personally involved in the situation.¹⁸

Gandhi's method of fasting was an earnest manifestation of *satyagraha* because it was wholly contingent on his own suffering. It was successful in changing attitudes because it elicited compassion and self-analysis within Hindus and Muslims. Each day that Gandhi continued the fast, even those who were peripherally involved in the movement grew increasingly concerned for him. It made the people who revered Gandhi feel ashamed that they were perpetrating violence, and he was suffering the consequences for their actions. As Gandhi said, "My fast is an appeal to everybody to search his heart. It should result in all-round self-purification. When the initial cleansing of the hearts has been effected, parties of Hindus and Muslims should go out together to patrol the troubled areas and relieve the police of its arduous duties."¹⁹ Gandhi's utilization of *satyagraha* as a persuasive tool forced people to self-regulate. This is the real merit of *satyagraha*: it recognizes the Self as the locus of change and requires that transformation be self-created, rather than externally imposed.

From Gandhi's perspective, and through his methods, this is the way true change comes about: internally, rather than externally, and through truthful means rather than through means that deceive. *Satyagraha* in action achieved a transformative value through persuasion, rather than through coercion. Gandhi's self-denial as a penance for others' actions brought out the best in those around him; it made them reflect on their own ways. It made them want to change themselves.

One who operates from self-sacrifice gains a valuable

moral high-ground, and in so doing, the stance is more legitimate, and dignity is sustained and cultivated, rather than denied. Self-sacrifice is wrought with a deep love and respect for humanity. As Martin Luther King, Jr. noted, “Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Gandhi believed love was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation.”²⁰ It is interesting that in both King’s and Gandhi’s times, the political use of *satyagraha* represented a novel extrapolation of individual morality to a societal level. From our vantage point decades after Gandhi’s and King’s social movements, however, we are forced to reconsider the individual applications of non-violence and the principle of love.

Applying Satyagraha Today in the World and at Home

King’s interpretation of Gandhi’s means and ends principle — that the “ends are pre-existent in the means” — has profound resonance in contemporary global affairs, and US policy-making, in particular. The recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan represent two of the most urgent global involvements, and it is imperative that we apply Gandhi’s means and ends principle to address the ethical implications of these conflicts. Behind the motivations for these wars was a broadly accepted notion that democracy would be established in Iraq through military conquest, and it would emerge as a shining example of progress for the larger Middle East region. Though the war in Iraq has technically ended, its effects are

debilitating and not yet fully known. Gandhi's means and end principle can be used to understand the far-reaching ethical implications of such a misguided foreign policy.

The initial steps leading to the war were antithetical to Gandhi's ideas in three ways. First, it reflected the vengeful idea that terror should be met with terror — that violence should give rise to more violence. The second misconception was that unilateral, illegal, and inhumane means would give rise to noble, peaceful ends. And third, the war effort was predicated on the idea that people in Iraq and the “Muslim World” were somehow inherently different from people in the West. This idea was an explicit rejection of human interrelatedness — a stance that mistook cultural differences for human ones. Coming of age when the political climate was characterized by images of mass violence, bombings, and horrifying ground wars, I could not help but question how this sort of retaliatory, state-sponsored violence would ever bring about democracy, not to mention peace.

It has been more than seven years since the United States' War on Terror began, and both military campaigns continue with renewed zeal. It is a common-place criticism to declare that “shock and awe” tactics in the name of preventing terror have in fact created even deeper waves of terrorism, fear, resentment, hatred, and fundamentalism. The approach of “us against them” has further entrenched and reified Samuel Huntington's once-controversial “Clash of Civilizations” thesis that post-Cold War global conflicts primarily take shape around irreconcilable cultural and civilizational differences — an idea predicated on an unfortunate world-view that

understands difference as an implicit and imminent security threat.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have lost their top spot in the media, but they continue to exact an astronomical human toll. I set out to understand the magnitude of this cost and soon learned that there is no official U. S. government tally for the number of civilian lives lost in Iraq and Afghanistan. How can there be no estimate of the *real* price that a nation's security costs? We have exact figures for the number of dollars spent each single minute of these wars. To date, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost nearly \$1 trillion. That amounts to \$8,646 per household, \$3,303 per person, and \$7,286 per taxpayer.²¹

We are keenly aware of the financial cost of the war, especially in terms of the economic choices and consequences that arise out of such outrageous spending. The estimated military budget for 2010 was \$663.8 billion,²² and the U. S. 's military expenditure accounts for nearly half of the entire world's military spending.²³ The U. S. is one of the most militarized places on earth, second only to Israel, but we must ask ourselves: Are we any safer as a result? It has become apparent that the financial cost of the war has done a great deal to alarm citizens and lawmakers alike, and while there are clear moral implications surrounding the ways in which finite fiscal resources are allocated, the human cost — the lives lost, children wounded, people displaced, and futures broken — brings an even greater *moral urgency* to the issue. The sheer devastation and loss of human life makes Howard Zinn's statement, "There is no flag

large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people,” echo loudly in this country’s conscience.

According to a reputable study reported in *The Lancet*, Iraq sustained 600,000 civilian casualties of July 2006. The non-profit organization *Just Foreign Policy* has arrived at more updated estimates by building on that study and using recent figures from Iraq Body Count to estimate that since the war in Iraq began, and as of the beginning of 2010, there have been nearly 1.4 million deaths in Iraq alone.²⁴ This figure is in addition to the nearly one million people who died as a result of U.S.-imposed economic sanctions just years before. Figures in the Afghanistan war go upwards to tens of thousands of lives lost, but are too unreliable to calculate with the same degree of certainty.²⁵

With just this information on the sheer magnitude of lives lost, and with a fundamental understanding of the injustice of the war itself, the principled response would be to end the war — even if it meant a military loss. President Barack Obama, however, weighed the information available to him and made the decision to send an additional 40,000 troops to Afghanistan in December, 2009. The monetary cost of this decision is expected to be \$4,000,000,000 — each one soldier reportedly costing \$100,000 per year. For the price of one soldier, whose orders are to use violence to bring stability, the U.S. could build one school in Afghanistan. Moreover, for the approximate cost of deploying 40,000 troops, the U.S. could provide primary education for almost 75 million children worldwide.²⁶

Roads, schools, sustainable sources of food, and shelters are needed in Afghanistan and other resource-poor parts of the world, afflicted with fundamentalism. They require development, but since 2001, we have seen the global community form more entrenched attitudes of violence and revenge. Even more dangerous than the daily bombings that occur throughout the most volatile parts of the world are the desperate attempts to legitimize the use of force by governments that most often employ it. It has become difficult to respect these governments, who try to claim that bombings, night raids, sanctions, and other forms of violence somehow distinguish between the innocent and the guilty. As Howard Zinn affirms, “it is the nature of bombing to be indiscriminate, to ‘make no distinction.’ Did we commit terrorist acts in order to ‘send a message’ to terrorists? We have responded that way before. It is the old way of thinking, the old way of acting, and it has never worked.”²⁷ No such distinction is possible, and in “targeting the guilty” through relentless military action, we have compromised any moral claim. The current unsuccessful war efforts demonstrate that perhaps building peace is the best way to create peace.

I highlight the examples of Iraq and Afghanistan not just to make a political point, but rather to illustrate the dissonance between American intentions and chosen methodology. The use of military violence has not only retrogressed American political gains, but most importantly, it has diminished American legitimacy and moral capacity. The failure to win Iraqi and Afghani hearts and minds, as many military personnel had wanted to do, is directly rooted in the means employed. How can

trust be built through deception and fear? How can peace be built through destruction? How can allies be created through means that beget enmity and bloodshed?

Violence is the most dehumanizing act, and Gandhi's method gives us tools through which we can arrive at means that honour dignity rather than trample upon it. The current states of Iraq and Afghanistan provide a political example that demonstrates the repercussions of large-scale policy-making; however, in order for this approach to maintain any relevance, the means and ends principle must be employed in our own lives. Too often we think of ideology as pertinent only to the realm of high politics. However, ideological thinking is most relevant in providing ethical frameworks for individual persons. As the previous discussion of satyagraha establishes, the source of transformative change is within the individual, and it is this belief that requires rigorous, personal application of consistent methodology.

I recently observed a brief interaction between a mother and child on the New York City subway that immediately made me recall the means and ends idea. A young mother, apparently frustrated with her crying son, was trying to calm him. Her goal was to have a calm and obedient child who would behave himself and stop crying. She decided to achieve this by dragging the small boy by his arm, yanking at him aggressively and shouting profanities. With every sharp tug, I noticed the child becoming even more upset, saddened, and difficult to quiet.

Though this small incident does not have much

apparent applicability to Gandhi's methods, it is precisely in these seemingly unimportant, daily moments that *ahimsa's* lived relevance is most relevant. In the few minutes I spent observing the mother and child, I noticed two things: first, the young boy became more distraught, louder, and harder to control; and second, the mother became more distraught, louder, and compromised her position as a loving nurturer during the exchange. She emerged in those few moments as someone who lacked restraint and who ultimately did more harm than good to her child. And in so doing, she ultimately hurt herself. While I am by no means able to offer advice on calming children, I imagine that had the mother simply picked up her son and appreciated his fatigue — had she submitted to his needs — he would have been far more soothed and comforted. In this case, perhaps calm and collected means would have achieved calm and collected results.

The danger of thinking about the means and ends principle as only applicable for displays of mass, spectacular violence, such as gunfights or war, is that we minimize or forget the role of active non-violence and principled living in daily life. Gandhi frequently emphasized this idea: "Like air, *satyagraha* is all-pervading. It is infectious, which means that all people — big and small, men and women — can become *satyagrahis*. No one is kept out from the army of *satyagrahis*... Just as anyone can resort to *satyagraha*, it can be resorted to in almost any situation."²⁸ In both large and small instances, the means and ends principle resonates with the essential truth that the methods we

employ always affect the end results, and in fact, shape who we become. This moral emphasis is what Gandhi's *swaraj* was really about.

Satyagraha versus Duragraha

To appreciate non-violence as both a method and an integral value one needs to understand the differences between *satyagraha* and *duragraha* — active non-violence and passive resistance, respectively. Gandhi was deeply committed to articulating the limitations and dangers of passive resistance because he believed that it misinterprets non-violence as only a methodology and not as an ultimate aspiration. He aimed to demonstrate that passive resistance, or *duragraha*, is a method that lacks firm principle because it utilizes non-violence as a tactic, rather than regarding it as an essential goal. In this sense, *duragraha* implies that non-violence can be abandoned if it doesn't seem beneficial. For Gandhi *satyagraha* was far more ideologically guided and saw non-violence as the only meaningful method. Such a distinction is crucial to understanding the commitment necessary to re-launching *satyagraha* today as well as grasping its implications for contemporary application.

In a speech to the Gujarat Political Conference in 1917, only about two years after Gandhi returned to India from South Africa, he outlines some of his key goals regarding his guiding methodology:

In *satyagraha*, there is always unflinching adherence to truth. It is never to be forsaken on any account.

Even for the sake of one's country, it does not permit resort to falsehood. It proceeds on the assumption of the ultimate triumph of truth. A satyagrahi does not abandon his path, even though at times it seems impenetrable and beset with difficulties and dangers, and a slight departure from that straight path may appear full of promise. Even in these circumstances, his faith shines resplendent in the midday sun and he does not despond.²⁹

Here, Gandhi emphasizes the necessity for unwavering conviction in following *satyagraha*. It cannot be just a policy, but needs to be a fundamental guiding ideology. Gandhi went on to discuss the fearlessness involved in practicing *satyagraha*, born out of a deep conviction in truth, saying,

In the intoxication of power, man fails to see his error. When that happens a satyagrahi does not sit still. He suffers. He willingly submits to the penalties of such disobedience, for instance, imprisonment and gallows. Thus is the soul disciplined.³⁰

This passage communicates Gandhi's positive perspective on human nature, as he located culpability in the corruptive force of power and might, rather than in the individual. He believed in hating the sin and not the sinner; he was adamant about differentiating between

individuals and what they become as a result of their actions, maintaining that the soul was essentially good. Gandhi believed that discipline is integral to the practice of *satyagraha* and the attainment of *swaraj*; by displaying restraint and standing by one's own truth, even if it does not seem expedient, practical, or sensible, one gains a veritable control over the Self to arrive at a kind of selfhood that is completely resonant with his definition of individual *swaraj*.

While Gandhi envisioned *satyagraha* as a deeply held, inflexible stance, he articulated *duragraha* as passive resistance that treats non-violence as a policy that is utilized only when advantageous. Gandhi believed that passive resistance was a method of the weak, explaining that, "Whilst it avoids violence, being not open to the weak, it does not exclude its use if, in the opinion of the passive resister, the occasion demands it."³¹ Because non-violence is not essential for the *duragrahi*, he is one that can mistakenly conflate physical force with strength, said Gandhi:

As we saw earlier, the terrible War going on in Europe is a case in point. Why should a nation's cause be considered right and another's wrong because it overpowers the latter by sheer brute force? The strong are often seen preying upon the weak. The wrongness of the latter's cause is not to be inferred from their defeat in a trial of brute strength, nor is the

rightness of the strong to be inferred from their success in such a trial.³²

Gandhi's allusion to nationalism here applies to the underlying ethos of contemporary international affairs in which power is measured almost exclusively by military strength. His statement that literal strength does not translate into moral strength nor ensure victory is indicative of the different ways in which the *satyagrahi* and *duragrahi* envision power. While the *duragrahi* thinks that power is literal and physical, the *satyagrahi* locates power in the strength of his or her conviction, moral discipline, and willingness to sacrifice.

Gandhi goes on to elaborate upon the *duragrahi* as someone who is not conscious of the means he employs. For the *duragrahi*, the means are not as vital as the end results, even if the means are untruthful:

The wielder of brute force does not scruple about the means to be used. He does not question the propriety of means, if he can somehow achieve his purpose. This is not dharma [righteousness] but the opposite of it. In dharma there can be no room for even a particle of untruth or cruelty, and no injury to life. The measure of dharma is love, compassion, truth. Heaven itself, if attained through sacrifice through these, is to be despised. Swaraj is useless at the sacrifice of truth. Such swaraj will

ultimately ruin the people.... They may not see results for a time. But *satyagraha* will triumph in the end. The *duragrahi*, like the oilman's ox, moves in a circle. His movement is only motion but it is not progress. The *satyagrahi* is ever moving forward.³³

The degree of self-awareness that *satyagraha* mandates reflects the individual and systems-based perspective of *swaraj* that Gandhi advocated. While both *satyagraha* and *duragraha* might be the means to deal with oppression, *duragraha* limits its questions to issues of strategy. *Duragraha* can be born out of deep antagonism and seeks to win over an enemy, whereas *satyagraha* remains wholeheartedly mindful of an adversary's humanity and seeks to build mutual resolutions. In this sense, *satyagraha* achieves true progress because it does not perpetuate a cycle of violence, hate, and oppression, but instead seeks to conquer such forces by accessing an individual transformative power.

The fundamental difference between the *satyagrahi* and the *duragrahi*, however, is not just one of methodology, but of commitment to principle. The *duragrahi*'s stance reflects that of most nationalist policies, for example. Though the U. S. does not actively seek out war with other nations, when seemingly under threat, it employs unbridled violence in the name of national security and political gain. It remains peaceful during peaceful times, and becomes aggressive in the face of aggression. President Barack Obama's standpoint on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars demonstrates the

position of the *duragrahi* best, in my opinion; though he does not *like* war, he supported it. Most people see war or violence as unfortunate and even unseemly, but the *duragrahi* can rationalize its necessity. In the same vein, Obama's calculated decision to send additional troops to Iraq and to eventually withdraw them was informed not by principle, but by political and military "pragmatism." There is no truthful principle that stands to justify the loss of civilian lives as collateral damage.

President Obama's decision is a startling reminder that non-violence must be a creed and cannot be a policy. A policy can change, but an ethos does not. Many supported Obama's decision, believing that there was no choice but to secure a military victory in Iraq, given that long-standing involvement was already underway. Nonetheless, if success had been conceived as cutting human losses and fulfilling humanitarian goals, increasing support for a needless war effort would have seemed completely futile. We need to arrive at a new definition of success.

The claim that unethical decisions are often a result of an absence of other recourse is categorically false. We always have choices. Being principled is not a privilege of circumstance, it is a firm stance that values conviction over comfort. The United States' stance on war, and the way in which the culture of nationalism has made state violence a perceived necessity for survival, represent the consequence of a series of deliberate choices. Once we choose to pursue policies guided by human values, we will realize the kind of actual progress that Gandhi

alludes to, and avoid the senseless motion that afflicts the *duragrahi*.

While I cannot attempt to offer a definitive analysis of the U.S.'s war efforts, I am deeply shaped by these involvements. Being a citizen of a country that continually chooses to engage in policies that cost human lives has made me consider Gandhi's means and ends principle on a multitude of levels. The antiwar movement was encouraging and powerful in the beginning of the war, but seven years later, it seems as though dissent has given way to apathy, resignation, and a general sense of helplessness. Most importantly, the ongoing and consistently renewed sanctioned violence of the current U.S. military policy has made me reevaluate what it means to create genuine social change.

Internalizing the difference between *duragraha* and *satyagraha* is imperative if we are to become modern day translators of *satyagraha* ourselves. The distinction between both modes of action ultimately lies in commitment to principled living—at all costs. If someone views non-violence as impractical or not expedient under certain circumstances, she or he will struggle to be a *satyagrahi* because their primary purpose is not guided by moral conviction. Gandhi's advocacy for consistency in the path of non-violence is an earnest reminder for activists and all individuals alike to more completely interrogate their own actions, and to aspire to methods that are as noble as their visions.

Gandhi's means and ends principle serves as a way to think about how we act — at home and in the world

— and it reminds us that there is not much distinction between the personal and political. At its core, *satyagraha* is an extension of a belief in human connectedness, which goes hand in hand with an adherence to truthful living. Gandhi's emphasis on the *satyagrahi's* ability to suffer and to have unconditional love for an adversary is still a difficult idea to understand and implement, even if we agree with it in principle. The next essay looks at how this notion of love, as integrally connected to soul-force, gives rise to a radical re-conceptualization of what constitutes power. This redefinition of power is central to Gandhi's revolutionary spirit and attitude, and it can continue to remind us of where our true strength lies.

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Gandhi walking to prayer meeting

4

Love as Power

Empowerment and Cultivating Love within Ourselves

*“Weak things have power.
Only the truly weak are free
of the temptation to dominate,
to harm. That is why
democracy is about weakness,
why it is to the weak we turn
for help when we are beaten,
condemned. That is why
poems continue like the air.”*

— Tom Wayman

Through its reliance on love, Gandhi's practice of *satyagraha* redefined the meaning of power. When we think of power, we typically conjure ideas of hierarchy — of possessing influence *over* something. In contrast, Gandhi's principle of human relatedness is more conducive to a horizontal framework of power, rather than the vertical, hierarchical one. This reorganization of how people can relate to each other emanates from a belief in equality, human family-hood, and mutual respect,

rather than mutual antagonism. Gandhi's methods redefine what it means to be strong, what it means to be brave, and what it means to wield influence. By utilizing peaceful methods to arrive at peaceful ends, he subverted mainstream, violent forms of power and encouraged a re-thinking of power.

At the core of Gandhi's ethics is the idea that love both animates and sustains *everything*. Gandhi's elevation of the principle of love provides an intensely powerful message in three primary ways. First, loving and respecting one's adversary in *satyagraha* cultivates bravery and generosity, which engenders personal empowerment. In this way, compassion becomes a force of resistance. Second, Gandhi's insistence on unconditional love for an oppressor is contingent on a need to love oneself first. This self-love is requisite to cultivating conviction, personal confidence and *swaraj*. Finally, non-violence, realized as an act of love, is a freeing process, and this freedom confers on the *satyagrahi* (one who utilizes *satyagraha*) a meaningful creative liberty.

Human Relatedness: The Seed of Love and Justice

Gandhi's adherence to *ahimsa* is predicated on total human relatedness. This idea, in turn, arises from an unconditional love for humanity, which is deeply connected to a strong spiritual faith in the potential divinity of all people. The resonant proclamation in ancient Vedic texts, "*tat tvam asi*," or "thou art that," conveys the essence of the *Advaita* philosophy, a non-

dualist tradition within the Hindu tradition, which maintains that God and man are ultimately interconnected. The idea that individuals are part of an Ultimate Reality not only carries the meaning of individual divinity, but connects and sanctifies all forms of life. Respect for sentience translates to love for one's adversary, love for oneself, and even a love for animals — an idea left for further discussion in a subsequent essay.

Human relatedness is the founding principle for Gandhi's utopian vision of *sarvodaya*, literally "universal uplift" or "progress for all." Sarvodaya was a term that Gandhi conceived as a title for his 1908 translation of English social thinker John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, a series of articles on political economy. Ruskin's views on labor and equality, and his overarching vision of social organization greatly impacted and shaped Gandhi's social views, as they prompted Gandhi to reevaluate his own approach to political economy, reinforcing his commitment to the worldview that a society needs to be based on justice, rather than be market-driven.

To illustrate this alternative social structure, Gandhi provided the example of a master and a servant who view their relationship solely as an exchange of wages for labour. In a market-driven paradigm of maximizing profit and balancing supply and demand, the employer will naturally grant minimum wages for maximum possible work. Conversely, the employee will provide effort commensurate only with his reimbursement. Gandhi argued that this monetary, calculative exchange does not consider the employer and employee's shared humanity and shared human needs:

This method of calculation would have been valid if the employee were a mere machine which required some kind of force to drive it. But in this case the motive power of the servant is his soul, and soul-force contradicts and falsifies all the calculations of the economists. The machine that is man cannot be driven by the money-fuel to do the maximum amount of work. Man will give of his best only when his affections are brought into play. The master-servant nexus must not be a pecuniary one, but one of love.¹

We can extend this frame-work to any exchange that privileges economic expediency over ethical treatment. When people are treated respectfully— as more than dispensable machines — they are motivated to give more of themselves. Gandhi firmly believed that “justice includes affection,” and that what motivates people and brings genuine social progress is not profit, but respect. In this way, if we think about material wealth as a particular form of power, Gandhi’s assertion of love as a unifying and motivating principle offers us an alternative definition.

Love as Courage

Gandhi encouraged others to see love as an ultimate source of power. “A coward is incapable of bearing love, it is the prerogative of the brave. Looking at everything with love, we shall not regard the Government with

suspicion, nor believe that all their actions are inspired with bad motives...Love can fight; often, it is obliged to.”² *Satyagraha* compellingly redefines strength as the capacity for restraint and sacrifice; by possessing the strength necessary to believe in an oppressor’s humanity, the *satyagrahi* verifies his own. In this act of resistance, the movement transcends its political or economic aims, instead emerging as a struggle to purify and better oneself. It constitutes true spiritual and moral progress.

The soul is informed with knowledge. In it burns the flame of love. ‘Non-violence is a dormant state. In the walking state, it is love. Ruled by love, the world goes on. In English there is a saying, ‘*Might is Right.*’ Then there is the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Both of these ideas are contradictory to the above principle. Neither is wholly true. If ill-will were the chief motive-force the world would have been destroyed long ago...We are alive solely because of love.’³

In the material sense, Gandhi was vehemently opposed to the idea that “*might makes right.*” Instead, he aimed to illuminate how moral capacity not only *requires* power, but cultivates it. His affirmation of love’s strength is resonant with his articulation that *satyagraha* is not an act of passivity. For him, *ahimsa* and love were concomitant principles that encouraged unity through *satyagraha*: “Love is a rare herb that makes a friend even of a sworn enemy and this herb grows out of non-

violence. What in a dormant state is non-violence becomes love in the waking state. Love destroys ill will.”⁴ Freedom from malice not only renders a method of resistance more viable, but has powerful effects on an individual’s moral progress. In this sense, love is the substance of *satyagraha* and contains within itself the seeds of political and personal progress.

Love in the Political

One of the enduring strengths of Gandhi’s concept of *satyagraha* is its ability to intermingle the personal and the political. Gandhi maintained that the love we observe between mother and child ought to be the model for interactions among individuals, communities, and nations; the moral fabric of all these human relationships is made of the same substance. While love is not often viewed as a legitimate political idea, Gandhi confidently integrated it into the foundation of his political thought. Most often, we think of love as religious, ethical, or purely sentimental, however, Gandhi’s notion of love in the political sphere greatly challenges this limited definition. Hannah Arendt also discusses the idea of *amor mundi* — love of the world — in her work. For her, love as a political concept invigorates conversations about common identity. In his study of Arendt’s perspective on love, Shin Chiba observes that Arendt:

attempts to take the notion of love out of its original religio-ethical context in order to ground it in the discourse of political theory. From this point of view, the notion of love can be seen as

a principle for constituting a community, that is, a principle of coexistence — or life together — with whatever is outside and heterogeneous.⁵

The utility of love as a political tool, then, is that it helps us identify what is common. In its most limited form, locating love in politics encourages “identity politics,” and in its most evolved state, the mitigation of differences.

In her book, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, scholar and Black feminist activist Bell Hooks offers an American civil rights translation of Gandhi’s *sarvodaya* (universal upliftment):

In the segregated South those black and white folks who struggled together for racial justice (many of whom grounded their actions not in radical politics but in religious conviction) were bound by a shared belief in the transformative power of love. Understanding that love was the antithesis of the will to dominate and subjugate, we allowed that longing to know love, to love one another, to radicalize us politically. That love was not sentimental. It did not blind us to the reality that racism was deeply systemic and that only by realizing that love in concrete political actions that might involve sacrifice, even the

surrender of one's life, would white supremacy be fundamentally challenged. We knew the sweetness of beloved community.⁶

Bell Hooks' words echo Gandhi's own love-inspired vision, which calls for self-sacrifice to transform both oppressed and oppressor. It is only through this application of unconditional love that ill-will, and the accompanying desire to dominate, diminishes. True power comes from this principled action and the emphasis on denying oneself, rather than denying others. Bell Hooks' words remind us that love does not only convey sentimentality on a personal level, but it also inspires and shapes political methods.

More than integrating love in "radical" social movements, there is a desperate need for us to incorporate this attitude in mainstream politics — even within politics that work within systems — rather than blatantly challenge them. Love must become an accepted ethos, not just the language of fringe movements. Political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri give voice to this necessity in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, saying,

People today seem to be unable to understand love as a political concept, but a concept of love is just what we need to grasp the constituent power of the multitude. The modern concept of love is almost exclusively limited to the bourgeois couple and the

claustrophobic confines of the nuclear family. Love has become a strictly private affair. We need a more generous and more unrestrained conception of love. We need to recuperate the public and political conception of love common to premodern traditions. ...We need to recover today this material and political sense of love, a love as strong as death. This does not mean you cannot love your spouse, your mother, and your child. It only means that your love does not end there, that love serves as the basis for our political projects in common and the construction of a new society. Without this love, we are nothing”⁷

The idea of extending sentimental love into the realm of political interaction resonates with Gandhi’s own perspectives. Hardt and Negri’s affirmation that the principles of human relatedness — and of basic human decency — need to find a legitimate place in our “political projects” reminds us that our politics can be humanized without losing saliency.

The principle of relatedness compels us to pose normative questions. As Tony Judt emphasized in his article, “What is Living and What is Dead in Social Democracy?” we tend to ask questions about expediency, rather than rightness:

For the last thirty years, in much of the English-speaking world (though less so in continental Europe and elsewhere), when asking ourselves whether we support a proposal or initiative, we have not asked, is it good or bad? Instead we inquire: Is it efficient? Is it productive? Would it benefit gross domestic product? Will it contribute to growth? This propensity to avoid moral considerations, to restrict ourselves to issues of profit and loss—economic questions in the narrowest sense—is not an instinctive human condition. It is an acquired taste.⁸

I would venture even further to say that not only does policymaking overlook questions of right or wrong, it finds them irrelevant. We are afraid to make value judgments because they ring of illegitimacy, but if we are ever to do the right thing, we need to ask the right questions.

Love-based morality needs a renewed legitimacy, steeped in a secular language of justice, and central to the decisions we make. We need to further question from where our accepted beliefs come, who produces them, and whom they benefit. These questions are especially relevant when we discuss empire building and its more insidious partner, neo-imperialism, and the assumption of universal norms and ideas, such as capitalism, as “commonsense.” Making decisions based on economic and

political expediency has not only become commonplace, but has become the commonsense.

Part of the neo-imperial project has been spreading certain human rights norms; we are now convinced that a woman in Western dress is more liberated and empowered than one who wears a head scarf — are we sold on the singular image of what a self-possessed woman looks like? Though some cultural practices can undeniably violate a universal sensibility of what is right, oftentimes our views are colored by a dominant culture's assertions. In many cases, we have come to think that traditional necessarily implies backward, and that Western articulations of rights, political systems, and social organization constitute the sole definition of progress. I raise point not to diminish the myriad crimes against humanity committed in the name of culture, but rather, to encourage a more sensitive look at how we arrive at our moral definitions. Thinking about our choices ethically, rather than “commonsensibly,” we are able to tease apart what we accept as rational and what we should maintain is *right*.

People's Power: The Collective in Action

One of the most concrete, modern redefinitions of power arises from the spectacular ascendance of people's power movements throughout the world in the twentieth century. While contemporary nationalist perspectives maintain that military and economic power wield the most clout, *satyagraha* has enabled the power of the collective. People's power, sometimes thought of as

“political power,” can be understood as the will of a people united against oppressive, often violent regimes.

Jonathan Schell, author of *The Unconquerable World*, argues that the twentieth century witnessed the rise of non-violent people’s power movements, consequent to violence defeating itself. Schell maintains that violence no longer offers legitimate recourse, as the global community has realized that the potential losses of its unbridled use are too high. This “transcendence” of violence is in part due to the growing resistance of people’s power movements as well as the threat of nuclear warfare — simply put, “because nuclear war blows up everything that people might fight about.”⁹ The quest to seek solutions in which violence is not the final arbiter has seen tangible results world-wide—from Gandhi and other anti-imperial struggles, to the revolutions in Vietnam, the Philippines, Poland, the former Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, among others. Schell discusses this human triumph over myriad forms of oppression:

And yet the universal conviction proved wrong — stupendously wrong. Human freedom has not died under totalitarian rule. It was about to make a spectacular demonstration of its power. The Cold War, paralyzed at the summit of the world order, was moving along unnoticed, circuitous pathways toward its amazing denouement. Resistance, blocked in the time-tested arteries of military action, was forced

into the world's unremarked-on capillary system, where, disregarded, it quietly advanced. And then it gushed forth in mass protest by entire societies. In retrospect, it's apparent that the long series of rebellions against the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe — in East Germany in 1953, in Poland and Hungary in 1956, and in Czechoslovakia in 1968 — which at the time looked like exercises in noble futility, were actually stages on the way to Soviet collapse. The actors were, among others, workers on factory floors, rebellious students, intellectuals talking to one another over kitchen tables or 'writing for the drawer,' dissidents who were promptly dispatched to concentration camps or psychiatric hospitals, disaffected technocrats, and even bureaucrats in the state apparatus. Every step they took was ventured without a chart or a clear destination. Yet the revolution they made was peaceful, democratic, and thorough.¹⁰

Love and the Power of Self-Affirmation

The previous section discussed how love, predicated on a vision of total human relatedness, provides an ethical framework that must inform political discussions. While

this application of love directs outward action, its inward, intimate power is to cultivate an attitude of self-love. Gandhi's vision of *swaraj* was not only concerned with self-purification, but was constituted by an affirmation of one's inherent self-hood. As noted throughout these essays, Gandhi's principles can and must be applied on multiple levels. The impetus for ethical action on the community or international fronts begins within ourselves.

In most of Gandhi's political writings on love, he discusses its importance in nurturing and building compassion, restraint, and in providing a *raison d'être* to the self-sacrifices attendant on *satyagraha*. Implicit in all these, I believe, is the presupposition of a healthy self-love and self-confidence. Gandhi's effort to equate the path of love with courage and bravery not only strengthens the political capabilities of *ahimsa*, but empowers the individual's sense of Self. Because the totality of *satyagraha* is predicated on internal transformations, it gives the individual power and ability to change him — or herself, and in turn, positively affect others.

Most important is the notion that individuals have the power to resist harm through the cultivation of their own attitudes. The idea that Indians granted permission for the British to dominate, for example, was a recurrent one for Gandhi. Rather than placing the onus on the oppressor, Gandhi's *satyagraha* depended on the crucial knowledge that we can only affect our own actions. Changing Indian minds was the primary concern of *satyagraha*, and through the transformation of Indian

minds, Gandhi maintained, a change in British policies and attitudes would naturally follow. His Holiness the Dalai Lama echoes this idea in terms of nurturing individual happiness. He argues that happiness is not a culmination of the right external circumstances, but a deliberate choice. We maintain the ability to perceive things differently, and as such, transforming ourselves and acquiring happiness are directly in our control.

This sense of responsibility for one's own actions and state of mind is deeply empowering because it locates change within oneself. The principle of self-love presupposes self-respect. Gandhi advocated for the synonymy of self-respect with *dharma*, or righteous action, saying, "May our nation become and remain the greatest in respect of all moral values. Man's self-respect lies in uplifting himself and in doing this not fearing even death."¹¹ He believed that a person who lives morally is implicitly respecting his own dignity. The performance of duties, and by extension righteous action towards others, is integrally tied to a positive self-image. This connection is of vital significance because it makes self-esteem a reflection of self-perceived character, rather than about an imposed, exogenous idea.

The idea of self-definition, free from societal influences, brings to mind Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of self-love. Rousseau held that there are two kinds of self-love: *amour de soi* and *amour-propre*. *Amour de soi* refers to a healthy love for oneself that can be thought of as a desire for well-being. *Amour-propre*, on the other hand, can be understood as vanity and is derived less from one's inner self, being instead shaped by others'

opinions. *Amour-propre*, therefore, is the product of man in society, and relies on other people's judgments. Both Rousseau and Gandhi advocated for a healthy *amour de soi*, which translates to self-possession, but one that does not devolve into vanity or pride.

Gandhi's notions of self-love and self-respect go hand in hand with love for others and the righteous action that emanates from this love. Most importantly, the notion that we control how we react to others' actions allows us to be immune from hurt if we do not give another the permission to hurt us. This is a direct extension of Gandhi's idea that India was responsible for its own subjugation. We can be freed from others' perceptions of us by focusing attention on our own actions and attitudes. This approach is essentially *satyagraha* applied to individuals, as it acknowledges that transformations are necessarily internal in origin.

Satyagraha certainly extends to issues of interpersonal abuse, including school bullying. Increasingly it seems that bullying is an issue in the lives of school children, often resulting in depression, or even suicide. These stories are devastating, and serve as reminders of the enduring cruelty of which children are capable. Most of these stories reported in the press include a call for some legislative or policy action that is directed towards monitoring or punishing school bullies. While these are important and necessary steps to implement, there is a noticeable lack of attention paid to teaching children how to confront bullying themselves, or how to prevent their own victimization. So much of the solution is about punishment after the fact and very

little is directed towards the people who bear the brunt of abuse. What if there were programmes or mentoring services to promote anti-bullying and to create a culture of confidence in which bullied children were given the tools not only to cope with bullying, but to also resist victimization by promoting healthy self-esteem? I am reminded of the countless examples of brave young people, who embark on campaigns to raise awareness about meanness in their school communities — while not everyone can assume this role, those that do achieve far more than just personal victories.

This may be a lofty and naïve idea, but it emanates from the deeply true principle that we can control only ourselves. It is impossible to externally legislate what needs to be internally created and monitored. It may be impractical or even impossible to erase cruelty from some people's hearts in any given moment, but it will always remain possible to change our own attitudes, to know how to confront adversity, and to recognize that true self-worth is never predicated on another's lack of it.

Love as Creative Freedom

Freedom from ill-will was not only central to satyagraha's success, but it enabled individual progress. The weight of malice is ultimately felt most by the person who bears it. As Martin Luther King, Jr. famously said, "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear." In this sense, Gandhi's emphasis on love-based methods was largely intended for the purpose of cultivating an inner, emotional freedom.

The freedom that non-violence enables is a form of innocence. And this state, Gandhi believed, comes about only when one practices total *ahimsa* towards all forms of life; "...non-violence is complete innocence," he said. "Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill-will against all that lives...Non-violence is therefore, in its active form, goodwill towards all life. It is pure Love. I read it in the Hindu scriptures, in the Bible, in the Koran."¹² The innocence that Gandhi refers to here can also be understood as happiness; this is a truth that we all seem to know, but rarely apply. Being kind, conscious, and generous are the surest ways to find peace within ourselves.

Moreover, the freedom that a love-based approach confers translates into a creative power. By locating a transformative power within the self and understanding that we are ultimately responsible for the ways in which we feel and react to other's actions, we transcend mere reflex. Jonathan Schell describes such a creative capability:

The non-violent actor exhibits the highest degree of freedom also because his action originates within himself, according to his own judgment, inclination, and conscience, not in helpless, automatic response to something done by someone else. He is thus a creator, not a mere responder."¹³

By avoiding the tit-for-tat reactions that are expected when confronted with violent or disruptive behavior —

be it a physical blow, or something as seemingly benign as gossip — we become more self-aware, and in turn, more innovative.

Creativity is absolutely central to the intellectual and moral project of non-violence. If we understand that restraint in the face of aggression is the ultimate form of strength, and that deliberate, volitional weakness is in fact one of the greatest acts of personal triumph, we need to always remain ready to adapt, and be able to apply these principles critically. We need to nurture and maintain an energy that is at its core dynamic and ever-changing, yet rooted in unconditional love. Most importantly, if we want to create change outside ourselves, we first need to cultivate a creativity from the strength that love inspires. In this way, we act consciously, and not out of the weakness of anger. Celebrated poet E.E. Cummings says it best: “If a *poet* is anybody, he is somebody to whom things made matter very little — somebody who is *obsessed* by *Making*.” Love gives us the wisdom to realize that we can only change ourselves. It makes us surpass expectations — our own, and those of others. It inspires us to offer our imaginations.

Notes

- 1 CWMG 8: 336. May 23, 1908.
- 2 CWMG 14: 63. November 3, 1917.
- 3 CWMG 14: 63-65. November 3, 1917.
- 4 CWMG 14: 299. March 30, 1918.
- 5 Shin Chiba, "Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political: Love, Friendship, and Citizenship" *The Review of Politics* Vol 57, No 3, 1995, pp 509.
- 6 Hooks, Bell. *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: H. Holt, 1996. 265.
- 7 Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: The Penguin Press. 351-352.
- 8 Judt, Tony. "What Is Living and What Is Dead in Social Democracy?" Editorial. *New York Review of Books*, 17 Dec. 2009.
- 9 "A conversation with Jonathan Schell: People Power vs. Nuclear Power" <http://www.robertboynton.com/article_Display.php?article_id=1538>
- 10 Schell, Jonathan. *The Unconquerable World: Power, Non-violence, and the Will of the People*. New York: Metropolitan, 2003. 189.
- 11 CWMG 67: 68. May 15, 1935.
- 12 CWMG 23: 24. March 9, 1922.
- 13 Schell, 133.



Gandhi at his 19th year of age. (Year 1888)

5

Gandhi as Rebel Defiance in *Hind Swaraj*

Journalist: What do you think of Western Civilization?

Gandhi: I think it would be a good idea.

Why are we afraid to be *radical*? Current mainstream politics and culture have turned *radical* into a slur. Instead of relying on words such as *ethical* and *conviction*, our political discourses are organized around words such as *centrist* and *mainstream*. The desire and need for popularity has made us forget to ask questions about moral choices. Instead we allow pragmatism to determine our decisions. Gandhi's courage in assuming unpopular but principled stances illustrates the need and possibility for change to originate from the margins — to defy the mainstream. In this essay, I focus on Gandhi's political manifesto, *Hind Swaraj*, as the articulation of his radical thought, which convinces us that any challenge to the status quo requires creative, "radical" approaches.

Gandhi believed that individuals, armed with unshakable conviction and the strength of Truth, could achieve revolution. He dared to be different in believing that we could realize a vision for how the world ought to

be, rather than endure the injustices that just are. In both his ideology and methodology, Gandhi was a rebel, and his political thought represents a radical departure from the mainstream ideas and methods of the Indian nationalist movement. His radicalism is illustrated most clearly in *Hind Swaraj*, in which Gandhi explores the framework for his political and social thought. It represents the culmination of several experimental ideas, which are at once groundbreaking in their progressiveness and yet surprisingly reactionary in their exaltation of a traditional, bygone Indian past.

In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi articulated his vehemently anti-industrialization, anti-modernity, and anti-West stance. He wrote it in ten days in 1909, while travelling from London to South Africa. This was subsequent to a three-month imprisonment in Pretoria, where he read The Gita, the Upanishads, and the works of Tolstoy, Ruskin, Emerson, and Thoreau. The concept he developed of holistic *swaraj* for self and society was shaped by all these sources. His idea of personal freedom is reflected in Thoreau's line from *Civil Disobedience*, "I saw that, if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through before they could get to be as free as I was."¹ Despite his literal captivity of imprisonment or colonial rule, Gandhi, like Thoreau, understood that true *swaraj* lay in living a principled life. Adherence to a path of principle was Gandhi's primary concern and informed the methods he articulated in *Hind Swaraj*. The format of the treatise also reflects an emphasis on method, as it is presented as dialogues between "Reader" and "Editor"

in which "Reader" assumes the voice of those who believe in the necessity of violence for national independence, while "Editor" advocates for *satyagraha*.

Hind Swaraj established Gandhi's goals not only as a political activist, but as an intellectual, seeking to rebel against oppressive institutions and ideas. In *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Albert Camus explored the metaphysical development of rebellion. His words seem to encapsulate the essence of Gandhi's rebellious spirit. Camus wrote,

The rebel undoubtedly demands a certain degree of freedom for himself; but in no case, if he is consistent, does he demand the right to destroy the existence and the freedom of others. He humiliates no one. The freedom he claims, he claims for all; the freedom he refuses, he forbids everyone to enjoy. He is not only the slave against the master, but also man against the world of master and slave. Therefore, thanks to rebellion, there is something more in history than the relation between mastery and servitude. Unlimited power is not the only law. It is in the name of another value that the rebel affirms the impossibility of total freedom while he claims for himself the relative freedom necessary to recognize this impossibility.²

This notion of “rebel” is implicitly non-violent. A rebel, Camus proposes, is someone who is willing to take risks to claim his own freedom, which belongs to everyone — Gandhi did this in both literal and figurative senses.

What Camus termed freedom, Gandhi called *swaraj*. Gandhi’s revolution was intended to attain a state of complete spiritual freedom for himself, the nation, and the world at large. This he believed, necessitated political and civil freedoms, which were not the totality of *swaraj*, but rather a constituent element. Just as the archetype of the rebel that Camus described, Gandhi fervently believed in denying no one’s freedoms. He did not even believe in his right to claim them. Instead, he believed only in his right to perform his duties, out of which freedom would naturally come, proclaiming that “The true source of rights is duty.”

Making a Break: Using Hind Swaraj to Reclaim Indian Identity

Gandhi believed that freedom has four dimensions: national independence, individual political freedom, freedom from poverty, and spiritual freedom.³ *Hind Swaraj* embodies a bold step towards national self-definition, as Gandhi attempted to carve out a vision of Indian self-hood that was wholly independent of the West and its dominance. For this reason, *Hind Swaraj* arguably needed to conflate Indian independence with indictments of the West and its modernity. In this regard, incendiary condemnations of Western civilization as “satanic” or “Godless,” reflected Gandhi’s efforts at reclaiming Indian identity.

The defiance within *Hind Swaraj* extended beyond the need to remake Indian identity, as it was rooted in a personal search to locate the self in a context of systemic racism and disenfranchisement. As Professor Dennis Dalton notes in *Mahatma Gandhi: Non-violent Power in Action* (2000), Gandhi was confronting his own racial inferiority, most especially during his time in South Africa. The blatant racism he faced caused him to internalize the caustic effects of colonialism. Malcolm X had a similar experience in reckoning with racism's erosion of his self-esteem, and in many ways, his exclusivist and angry words against White institutions refashioned a confident self-identity in the face of racism. The anger of Malcolm X as well as Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* was not a final point of arrival for either leader — it was demonstrative of the process of ideological rebellion.

In this way, *Hind Swaraj* expresses the need for all claims of self-hood to make a break, to be defiant, to be “radical.” Aimè Césaire, one of the founders of the negritude movement, expresses this requirement in anti-colonial struggles, saying, “Decolonization is not automatic... It is always the refusal of a struggle, the result of a struggle, the result of strenuous efforts. Even the most peaceful form of decolonization is always the result of a rupture.” The kind of rupture to which Césaire alludes encompasses both the project of recasting national identity as well as searching for a personal self-hood, beyond a legacy of subjugation. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi strove to make those ruptures as well as create a new substance for “authentic” Indian identity.

Ideological Violence in Hind Swaraj

Hind Swaraj established Gandhi's basic categorical differences between the West and East. He sought to use a non-Western vocabulary, often employing Hindu references and images. As Ashis Nandy notes in *Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, "The West has not merely produced modern colonialism, it informs most interpretations of colonialism. It colours even this interpretation of interpretation."⁴ Consequently, Gandhi envisioned swaraj as predicated on methods and ideas that were basic to Indian culture. His consequent celebration of a classical Indian past gave rise to some essentialist and reactionary ideas—ones that arguably reinforced Western stereotypes. In a speech he delivered in 1918, Gandhi outlined some of this civilizational identity as he defined it:

I have come here to tell you that you should have faith in your civilization and keep to it steadfastly...The swaraj of which we hear will not be achieved the way we are working for it...We shall get swaraj through the way in which we live our lives It cannot be had for the asking. We can never gain it through copying Europe...That European civilization is satanic we see for ourselves... We must make use of the legacy left us by our rishis and munis.⁵

The seeds of this sentiment were contained in *Hind Swaraj*, written approximately a decade earlier.

In declaring Western civilization as “godless,” Gandhi dichotomized the East and West. He envisioned India as a nation free from the morally corrupting effects that modernity, and implicitly Western rule, engendered. Gandhi’s anti-modernity stance was rooted in a disdain for industrialization and mechanization, as he argued that these developments were exploiting and impoverishing Indians. His discomfort with modernity also extended to urbanization, and he proposed the locus of authentic Indianness was and ought to remain in the village, saying, “I am convinced that if India is to attain true freedom and through India the world also,” he said, “then sooner or later the fact must be recognized that people will have to live in villages, not in towns, in huts, not in palaces.”⁶ For India to become “authentically” Indian and pure, he argued it must return to a bucolic socialist order.

This imagining of authentic India is remarkably similar to conservative efforts within the United States to locate genuine “Americanness” in small-town America — in the country’s less urbanized, less elite, less cosmopolitan areas. In the advent of globalization and burgeoning diversity, this movement to revert back to White, Christian roots seems to be growing. More extreme than reconnecting to traditional American roots is the increase in membership in white supremacy groups, most notably since President Obama’s election. A relatively recent vigor in social conservatism has also led to pushing push toward policies that curb civil liberties, rather than

extend them. These trends may be indicative of how communities assert localism when seemingly threatened by increasing diversity. Gandhi sought to re-locate an Indian spiritual tradition, which can be seen as an assertion of local identities — a project similar to the one Christian conservatives and the far Right are endeavoring towards today. I raise this point not to bring legitimacy to the projects of the Christian Right, but rather to connect the tendency to reclaim and maintain “authenticity” in the face of new ideas.

Most interesting is Gandhi’s equating of modernity with Western civilization, a conflation that was in many ways a product of British, orientalist thought. Many third world thinkers today would ask why the Global South cannot develop along similar lines to the West. What does a community lose, if anything, when small farmers have access to cell phones or laptops? Though modern technology and development have undoubtedly made life easier, in *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi encourages us to think of progress as more than the acquisition of amenities and things. By making incisive statements such as, “The tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God,”⁷ was Gandhi’s spiritualization of Indian society ultimately empowering, or did it seek primarily to denigrate the West? In this way, was it a breach of the doctrine of total ahimsa? I would venture that Gandhi’s treatise was not intended to be an ideologically violent tract, but its harsh rhetoric reflected his desire to rediscover Indian culture. *Hind Swaraj* was

most important for its boldness and risk-taking, and Gandhi's assertive statements were crucial in the development of his radicalism. Through it, we can see Gandhi emerging as experimenter, thinker, and vocal dissenter.

Moving Radicalism Forward

When we think of popular images of Gandhi we tend to emphasize his victories, without paying equal attention to the trajectory and development of his ideas. We tend to think of his ideas of complete non-violence as a final point of arrival and less as a process of experimentation. We tend to mitigate the radicalism of popular leaders such as Gandhi because his appeal was in his ability to connect and organize people of different persuasions. The impassioned ideas presented in *Hind Swaraj*, should not be cast aside, but instead need to be appreciated for their capacity to represent this process, if not for their content alone.

Gandhi avoided dogma in his ideology, but later revised his opinions and articulations of key issues such as the question of women and Muslims. He used *Hind Swaraj* as a laboratory of sorts, and the internal inconsistency of some of his ideas attests to the fluidity and experimental nature of his early political thought. While at once he did want to strive towards an independent India, he sought to create a nationalism that transcended the boundary of nation. This nuance in Gandhi's thinking also brings to light the fluid meanings of certain words –nationalism meant something different

to Gandhi during the *satyagraha* movement than it does to us now.

Though Gandhi's indictment of modernity and the West seem impassioned, the radicalism of *Hind Swaraj* was careful and deliberate. Gandhi's radicalism in *Hind Swaraj* demonstrates more than just freedom from colonial rule, an imperial model, and colonial institutions; it also presents the evolution of his notion of swaraj. We should not easily dismiss it as reactionary "lapses into pure fantasy."⁸ The synthesis of his thinking demonstrates that extremism and experimentation are imperative in the development of our own thinking and our ideologies. How do we know balance unless we have experienced imbalance? How can we value inclusion until we have known its opposite?

Several scholars, otherwise sympathetic to Gandhi's core message, have argued that *Hind Swaraj* represents a young, exclusivist stance. I take respectful exception with the argument that "even in 1909, this portrayal of world cultures as mutually exclusive did not really befit a syncretic thinker like Gandhi."⁹ Gandhi had most certainly been inspired by Thoreau, Tolstoy, Ruskin and other Western thinkers; however, his deep respect for their ideas did not translate to a respect for Western hegemony. As previously discussed, *Hind Swaraj* was an exploration of self-hood. Gandhi's notion of freedom was tied to an aspiration for statehood — an imagination of political community that by its very constitution is bounded; it is qualified by its exclusivity. It had to be exclusive to be accepted in the world community, yet we do not readily identify this kind of nationalism as

ideologically violent. Gandhi never repudiated the central vision embodied by *Hind Swaraj*. He wrote in 1938, "After the stormy thirty years through which I have since passed I have seen nothing to make me alter the view expounded in it."¹⁰ In this sense, the rhetoric may not have been conducive to building bridges; however, the articulation of ideology was absolutely essential for Gandhi's future political and moral thought. It established him as a voice of dissent.

Radical Methods

Hind Swaraj was radical not only in its condemnation of the West, but also in its proposal of non-violence as a means to make a break from colonial rule. Gandhi's vehement indictment of Western civilization may have been forceful, but it is imperative to remember that the methods Gandhi espoused were radical in their non-violence, not in their anger. Whereas a leader such as Napoleon maintained that revolutions are necessarily violent, Gandhi's idea of revolution was subversive in its method, and in its love-based, rather than force-based foundation. Gandhi's notion of revolution makes us rethink what revolution means. Jonathan Schell notes this turn to non-violence as a political tool, saying, "At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Napoleon, in exile on St. Helena, laid down the law in the following dictum: 'General rule: No social revolution without terror. Every revolution is, by its nature, a revolt which success and the passage of time legitimize but in which terror is one of the inevitable phases.'" In the same vein, Marx maintained the near inescapability of violence in social

change movements, noting, "Violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one."¹¹

It has become an accepted belief that political and societal change is accompanied by violence. Gandhi's denial of colonial violence was the first step in undoing this assumption. His belief that political changes are potentiated by spiritual ones offers the substance for a spiritual revolution, as his ultimate aim was a moral revival of self and society. It was radical in that it reconceived how people should relate to each other — it was wholly contingent on a shift in consciousness and self-inspired transformations, rather than external impositions.

The strong stances that Gandhi assumed in *Hind Swaraj* are profound examples for progressive social movements today. *Hind Swaraj's* fundamental anti-imperial perspective gives us insight into how we can rethink global and local political issues that arise out of inequalities between and within the "Third World" and the West, or the "haves" and the "have nots." The struggle for national self-determination was ultimately resistance against inequality. Gandhi battled colonial forces in terms of economic and cultural dominance, and today we continue to struggle against neocolonialism in myriad forms. In many instances, corrupt governments of previous colonized nations have neatly supplanted colonial masters; the struggles continue to be centered around the same inequalities and denial of dignity.

The vision of economic justice that Gandhi presented in *Hind Swaraj* gives rise to prescient questions that

inform our political discussions about job creation, health care, education, urban poverty, and questions of social justice. The anxiety and ambivalence towards modernity and its dependence on machines and technology resonates with our contemporary relationship with technology. Not one day passes when people do not question how social utilities such as Facebook or Twitter affect how we share information and connection, and how the internet has fundamentally shaped our sense of political community and individual identities. *Hind Swaraj* and its refusal to readily accept the new inventions of modernity continues to ask us these questions. Amid the wealth of information and methods to connect, we still continue to wonder, are we any wiser? Are we any better related?

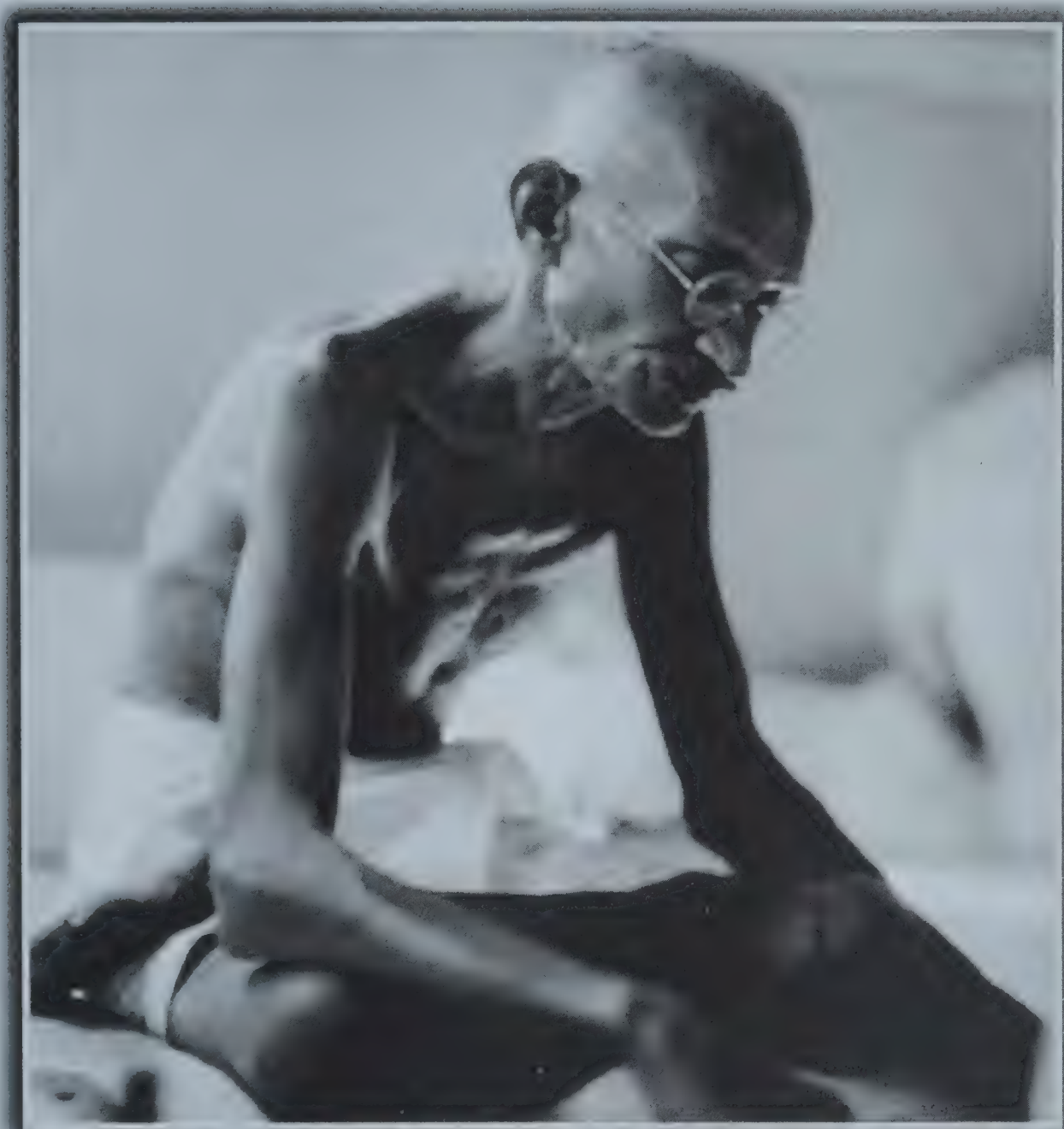
Most fundamentally, Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is a political work whose vocabulary is moral and spiritual. It created a space in which societal concerns became more than policy — they became deeply personal matters that appeal to one's sense of right and wrong. Gandhi's religio-ethical approach accomplishes this synthesis of faith and ethics, and in so doing, offers us a wholly different way to dissent and ask questions.

If we return to Albert Camus' idea of the rebel and Edward Said's notion of the intellectual as a peripheral figure, we can bring new meaning to Gandhi's personal emphasis on experimentation. *Hind Swaraj* embodies Gandhi's principle of courage, as he was unapologetic in stating his opinions. Finally, what does it mean to be a radical in our own lives? In the current political climate in the U.S., for example, where moderation is the mainstream and exalted stance, the prevalent belief is

that the truth is somewhere between both sides of the story. We not only consider both views, but we tend to disbelieve each one, thinking that what is most legitimate has to be somewhere in between. This idea applies to conflicts such as the Palestinian/Israeli struggle, in which mainstream voices of peace insist that what is “right” has to be some hybrid of both sides of the story, but what if this is not the case? Radicalism is about believing in an alternative. Gandhi’s own radicalization demonstrates that living on the periphery is about asking difficult questions, being willing to stand up for what we believe is true, and fearlessly enduring the consequences of such principled living.

Notes

- 1 Dalton, Dennis. *Mahatma Gandhi: Non-violent Power in Action*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000, 17.
- 2 Camus, Albert *The rebel: an essay on man in revolt*, Volume 1956, Part 1. Charlottesville: Vintage Press, 1978. 248.
- 3 Parel, Anthony J., Ed. *Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000. (pp. 4-6).
- 4 Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1988. xii.
- 5 CWMG 14: 299. March 30, 1918.
- 6 Gandhi, M. K., and Anthony J. Parel. *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 150.
- 7 Gandhi, M. K., and Anthony J. Parel. *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 71
- 8 Dalton, 20.
- 9 Dalton, 21.
- 10 CWMG: 31, 46.
- 11 Schell, Jonathan. *The Unconquerable World: Power, Non-violence, and the Will of the People*. New York: Metropolitan, 2003. 104-105.



Gandhi during a fast

6

Ethical Eating

Vegetarianism and Ahimsa as Lifestyle

*“Non-violence is a
comprehensive dharma.”*

– Gandhi, 1927¹

Each day we make choices and apply personal ideologies to all these deliberations. Most of our involvements are the culmination of a series of choices — the company we keep, the clothes we wear, the work we do, and the food we eat. Living in a global consumer culture, we are constantly presented with new material things and ideas, and it is imperative to ask ourselves if what we support through our consumption is as ethical as the values to which we aspire. Gandhi’s emphasis on consistently applying *ahimsa* to everyday living was most directly reflected in his vegetarianism. Non-violent, informed eating is the most literal extension of conscious consumption, and the most direct application of *ahimsa* in our daily decision-making.

Gandhi’s significance today, is in translating didactic principles intended to guide ethical behavior on the social level, to the level of individual living. *Ahimsa* loses its

integrity if it is applied only when we think about war or physical interpersonal violence; it must become a deeply personal and reflective ethos that also informs how and what we support with our attention, choices, and resources. Vegetarianism, particularly in the West, has become more mainstream over the past fifty years or so; however, it remains difficult to broach because it confronts deeply personal choices. It is difficult to question the moral basis of such an intrinsic part of our lives without offending those with whom we engage. Despite these challenges, it is essential to ask questions about what we eat that go beyond arguments for health, environmental sustainability, and animal treatment policy — our questions need to approach the ethical. Applying ahimsa suggests that is not enough to arrive at vegetarianism because it makes good sense; instead, it needs to evolve from a basic ethical compulsion. Is it justified to sacrifice lives for our enjoyment when we can easily find sustenance in other ways? Can we aspire to non-violence in our communities if we support the killing of billions of animals for our meals?

If we are to begin making any meaningful transformations within ourselves, it is essential that we consider a less violent lifestyle and a higher consciousness of what we consume. The aim is not to convince others to become vegetarian, but rather to encourage a process of reflecting on and challenging daily choices. Gandhi's ideas and methods offer an ethical toolbox of sorts, and how we make meaning out of these ideas is our own responsibility. Vaclav Havel underscores this point in discussing the limitations of thinking about social issues

as solely political and not as a “problem of life itself.”² He offers the idea that affecting everyday living is an “incomparably more consistent approach because it aims at the very essence of things.”³ Focusing on our everyday lives, therefore, is not giving up on creating larger progress, but is instead an acknowledgement that change is the product of collective individual efforts and small-scale decisions.

Gandhi’s personal adherence to vegetarianism receives little attention as a central tenet of his political and moral thought, perhaps because it is seen more as a cultural choice than an ideological stance. I am often asked if my own vegetarianism is religiously motivated, and there seems to be a general understanding that Gandhi’s was as well, even though there is no doctrine, per se, within Hinduism that requires vegetarianism. A spiritually informed regard for sentience within the Hindu tradition and the practice of *ahimsa* towards all forms of life — even the microscopic, in the Jain tradition — inspired and shaped Gandhi’s respect for life, irrespective of species.

Gandhi emphasized that vegetarianism is not a hereditary habit, but a deliberate choice to abstain from violence. He argued that vegetarianism needs to be understood as a moral journey and not a health-related one. During a meeting of the London Vegetarian Society, Gandhi outlined the need for a moral foundation for vegetarianism, saying,

I discovered that for remaining staunch
to vegetarianism a man requires a

moral basis. For me that was a great discovery in my search after truth. At an early age, in the course of my experiments, I found that a selfish basis would not serve the purpose of taking a man higher and higher along paths of evolution. What was required was an altruistic purpose.⁴

Emphasis on the volitional, selfless aspects of this choice resonates with Gandhi's distinction between the *satyagrahi* and the *duragrahi*. Gandhi saw vegetarianism as an implementation of *ahimsa*, and therefore, just as the practice of *satyagraha*, a complete commitment. In contrast to the *satyagrahi*, the *duragrahi* employs non-violence out of expedience and not out of conviction. In a similar vein, Gandhi argued that vegetarianism, like all ethical stances, needs to be motivated by core principles and not by temporary circumstances.

Gandhi's personal commitment to vegetarianism was part of his oath of *brahmacharya* — a spiritual doctrine of living that is predicated on vows of celibacy, simplicity, non-violence, and monasticism. This oath of *brahmacharya* was an experiment in how far he could control his thoughts, actions, and desires. Though monasticism is not relevant or desirable for most, the restraint required by such a lifestyle has the potential to inspire a deeper consciousness of how we live. In this way, we can begin thinking of vegetarianism as a manifestation of both *satyagraha* and *brahmacharya*, as it is intended to cultivate personal restraint and inspire self-transformations as a result of conscious engagement.

Measuring Animal Suffering

To understand vegetarianism as a manifestation of non-violent living, we need to comprehend the degree of animal suffering and the number of animal lives sacrificed for food. In the U.S. alone, nearly 10 billion animals are slaughtered for food each year. To make more sense of that number, that amounts to approximately 27 million animals each day, and 19,000 each hour. Worldwide that number escalates to about 50 billion animals each year, which means that 1,680 animals are killed each and every second.⁵ According to the USDA estimates for 2007, the average per capita consumption of meat was 222 pounds.⁶ If one is more compelled by an environmental argument against the factory farming of animals, then the staggering amount of food resources used to feed livestock — about 90% of soybeans and 80% of corn grown in the U.S. — should communicate how unsustainable factory farming is.⁷ All the food, land, and energy resources used to produce meat for those in the world who can afford it could instead go towards addressing world hunger. As a result of inequalities in food availability, cattle in Europe sadly have more food security than the average farmer in India.

My argument for adopting a vegetarian lifestyle, however, is not motivated by the sheer number of animals killed, which is in itself beyond comprehension. Neither is my rationale for adopting vegetarianism a reaction to the hellish reality of factory farming and its barbaric methods of treatment, in which animals are

routinely crushed, de-beaked, ground, stunned, crammed, and force-fed or starved. Arguments for vegetarianism that only emphasize the magnitude and mistreatment of animals constitute critiques of factory farming and the methods of violence, rather than the fundamental condemnation of animal slaughter. Animals are not ours to wear, they are not ours to exploit or harass, and they are not ours to eat. These facts and figures ought to inspire a *belief* in non-violence, not just support an argument for it.

Animal suffering cannot be measured by statistics, just as human suffering cannot be understood as some calculus. I highlight these numbers, however, to bring to light the degree of our desensitization to non-human life. Vegetarianism as Gandhi practised it was not motivated by the belief that animals and humans are the same; it was inspired by the desire to extend human compassion. So often our reactions to injustice are statistically mediated. We might be, for example, stunned that 1.4 million civilian lives have been lost in the Iraq war, or that 17 civilians died in recent drone attacks in Pakistan, or that 50 billion animals are slaughtered worldwide. If we are so outraged by this magnitude of killing, why should even a little bloodshed be tolerated? Is it less morally reprehensible to know that only 100,000 Iraqis have died unjustly, for example, or that only 7 billion animals were slaughtered? Is our compassion determined by some arbitrary cutoff of suffering?

The Case for Moral Absolutism: Differing Paths Toward Vegetarianism

*A vegetarian diet is the acid
test of humanitarianism.*

– Leo Tolstoy

The central question of our complicity in animal suffering is at the crux of vegetarian ethics, and has been the profound commitment of ethicist Peter Singer. Since the 1970s, especially after the publication of his widely popular book, *Animal Liberation*, animal rights have received increasing public attention and legitimacy. Singer applies a utilitarian framework to advocate for better treatment of animals and an end to animal cruelty.

Utilitarianism is concerned with maximizing pleasure and mitigating pain. It poses the question: is this going to maximize utility for the greatest number? In the utilitarian perspective sentient beings (defined as ones that can perceive pain) have moral consideration and need to be part of the maximum pleasure, least pain equation. In this sense, utilitarianism comes to the conclusion that the pain and suffering of billions of animals is not worth the amount of pleasure that is derived from the people who consume them. With this in mind, Singer advocates for increased consciousness and responsibility of animal treatment:

The animals themselves are incapable of demanding their own liberation, or of protesting against their condition with votes, demonstrations, or bombs.

Human beings have the power to continue to oppress other species forever, or until we make this planet unsuitable for living beings. Will our tyranny continue, proving that we really are the selfish tyrants that the most cynical of poets and philosophers have always said we are? Or will we rise to the challenge and prove our capacity for genuine altruism by ending our ruthless exploitation of the species in our power, not because we are forced to do so by rebels or terrorists, but because we recognize that our position is morally indefensible?⁸

Singer rejects the idea that moral beliefs and ethical processes are one and the same. "Our moral convictions are not reliable data for testing ethical theories,"⁹ he claims. We should work from sound theories to practical judgments, not from our judgments to our theories." Singer, like Gandhi, does not emphasize a rights-based approach. In fact, his popular manifesto, *Animal Liberation*, which marked the beginning of the mainstream animal rights movement, very sparingly mentions "rights." Despite this shared de-emphasis, however, Singer and Gandhi arrive at the conclusion of vegetarian ethics through remarkably different intellectual trajectories.

While Singer aims to elaborate on his case for better animal treatment, Gandhi's vegetarianism emanated from a moral absolutist perspective in which killing animals

for food — regardless of how they are treated — is not ethical. Singer is not a moral absolutist; he rejects this idea, but is instead more concerned with the consequences of actions. In this way, Singer believes vegetarianism is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Whereas Gandhi's absolutism is concerned with the consistency with which an individual lives his principles, Singer's utilitarianism sees the individual as capable of making ethical choices that culminate in achieving social justice — in this case, bringing about more humane treatment of animals.

Gandhi was a vehement moral absolutist and this was perhaps where he displayed his courage and leadership most clearly. For him, there were some fundamental convictions that just needed to be *lived*, not proven, and these convictions should be unrelenting. This idea is manifest in Gandhi's refusal ever to eat the flesh of an animal—for him, the act of eating the animal was wrong, and violent. Gandhi's strength of conviction in ahimsa is evidenced by his unflinching adherence to vegetarianism under any circumstances, underscoring the intensity of his commitment to principle: "But the basis of my vegetarianism is not physical, but moral," he said. "If anybody said that I should die if I did not take beef-tea or mutton, even under medical advice, I would prefer death."¹⁰ The willingness to make such a lofty compromise for his conviction communicates what the path of a *satyagrahi* is truly about. Though the literal application of such absolutism may not be considered pragmatic, Gandhi's steadfastness demonstrates that viewing ethical choices as fundamental to who we are

has the potential to cultivate tremendous courage and personal character. As Gandhi wrote, “Not for the world should you sacrifice a moral principle.”¹¹

Gandhi and Singer also arrived at their beliefs in sentience from two distinct places. Gandhi’s belief in equality arose from an appreciation of interrelatedness — a spiritually derived ethic in which all forms of life have potential divinity. Singer, however, articulates a principle of equal consideration that is secular in origin and focuses more on the final treatment of animals and less so on the use of animals for food: “The basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical *treatment*; it requires equal *consideration*.”¹² Singer would not object to eating a lamb if it had been hit by a car because it died for purposes other than his meal. His objection is more with the method of factory farming and less so with the fundamental use of animals for food.

In this way, Singer’s argument does not go far enough because it is too incremental. His support of more “humane” methods of growing and killing livestock also points to his concern for particular policies of treatment; it does not fully address how we view non-human lives. Most importantly, it presupposes that there is a humane method of harvesting animals for food. What can be humane about slaughter? While there is much to gain from thinking about change as the culmination of small steps, Gandhi’s moral absolutism offers important ways to begin thinking about what we believe, and most importantly, what we are prepared to sacrifice for our principles.

Inspiring, Not Imposing

Gandhi was not interested in enforcing vegetarianism, as he saw it as requiring a personal transformation. He responded to an incident of Hindus imposing vegetarianism on Muslims by stating that, "It is violence, not non-violence, forcibly to prevent someone from eating the kind of food he likes to eat...In peaceful non-co-operation compulsion is forbidden."¹³ Just as Gandhi's means and ends principle dictates, the method of promoting vegetarianism cannot belie its fundamental ethos of compassion, non-violence, and personal responsibility. It is imperative, therefore, for activists to have heightened sensitivity to the ways in which they promote their ideas, being mindful to inspire, not to impose.

The commitment to ethical consumption is important, but there is no need to make its adherence an ultimatum. The application and extension of *ahimsa* in our consumption is ultimately about intention and consciousness. We can aspire to total non-violence in our living, but we will rarely achieve that state. Gandhi cited his own inability to give up milk for health reasons, despite his belief that drinking milk was a morally questionable practice. He considered this weakness "the tragedy of [his] life."¹⁴

Whether it is indirectly supporting sweatshop labour, mistreated workers, animal cruelty, corporate irresponsibility, or simply over-utilizing shared resources,

we are, in part, complicit in the exploitation and deprivation our consumption enables. Despite this inescapable reality, we aspire to mitigate the injustice with which we may be inadvertently complicit. Adopting vegetarianism is one such method of consumer boycott and conscientious living, but at the same time, as Gandhi reminded, “We must not make a fetish of our vegetarianism and be intolerant.... Let us not attribute more virtue to vegetarianism than it can carry... It is only real godliness that alters the whole course of life.”¹⁵

Notes

- 1 CWMG 35: 380. December 13, 1927
- 2 Havel, Vaclav, Steven Lukes, and John Keane. *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-eastern Europe*. Armonk: M 34 ICbWidM. G 48: 327, November 20, 1931. E. Sharpe, 1990. 68.
- 3 Ibid
- 4 CWMG 48: 327, November 20, 1931.
- 5 Williams, Erin E. and DeMello, Margo. *Why Animals Matter*. Prometheus Books, 2007, p. 73.
- 6 http://www.humanesociety.org/news/resources/research/stats_meat_consumption.html
- 7 http://animals.change.org/blog/view/animal_use_and_abuse_statistics_the_shocking_numbers
- 8 Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*. New York: New York Review, 1975. 273.
- 9 Singer, Peter. "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9. 4 (1980): 327.
- 10 CWMG 48: 328, November 20, 1931
- 11 CWMG 48: 328, November 20, 1931
- 12 *Animal Liberation* (New York: A New York Review Book, 1975), p. 2
- 13 CWMG 20: 146, May 29, 1921.
- 14 CWMG 48: 328. November 20, 1931.
- 15 CWMG: 63, 404 July 26, 1937.



Gandhi with Rabindranath Tagore in 1940

Thinking Globally About Gandhi

Globalization, Modernity, and Gandhi and
Tagore's Visions of Political Community

*The only thing in the
world worth globalizing is
dissent.*

– Arundathi Roy

Globalization has become an essential fact of contemporary living. Nearly every aspect of our experience and our world is affected and shaped by globalizing forces — the information we receive, the politics of our communities, our most basic understanding of the world. We live in an interconnected world order, in which people and nations of the world interact as though we are in a global village. Gandhi's global consciousness was inspired by his spiritual faith and central belief in human relatedness. I have argued that this principle of human connectedness forms the basis of Gandhi's ethics of non-violence; in this essay, I extend the discussion from personal ethics to an exploration of globalization and how we think of political community

beyond exclusive nationalism, through a survey of Gandhi's and Rabindranath Tagore's respective views on nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

If we are to arrive at an understanding of how *ahimsa* can be applied in our own lives, the principle must apply as readily on the level of nation-state as it does on the level of personal interaction. Though globalization has given rise to immeasurable progress, not all advancements translate into steps forward for the world's most marginalized people. As the world's privileged create and reap the benefits of globalization, we have witnessed the simultaneous rise of exploitation and alarming levels of inequality. It was precisely this kind of unequal development against which Gandhi argued, and his indictment of modernity in his 1909 manifesto, *Hind Swaraj*, was an articulation of these views. Today, dissent against inequality can be seen in forms ranging from fragmented community groups to the more cohesive, international "Occupy Wall Street" movement and the Arab Spring of 2011. Most importantly, globalization has emerged largely as Westernization, as the spread of Western goods, ideas, and norms has been undeniable. Both Gandhi and Tagore were deeply critical of Western empire, and their dissent offers meaningful insight into how we can continue to think of globalization, its attendant inequalities, and the rise of narrow nationalisms.

Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore were, at their core, theorists of the colonial condition in India, and their divergent views on the meanings of the Indian nation-state illuminate a larger project of interrogating the

nation-state not only as the primary locus of political legitimacy, but also as an artifact of Western empire. Widely acknowledged as “the two most influential theorists of “Indianness” of our times,”¹ Tagore’s and Gandhi’s ideas have been inextricably linked to India’s struggle for self-determination, and give rise to thought-provoking questions about the role of the modern nation-state as a site of anti-colonial and post-colonial resistance.

Gandhi and Tagore were both key actors in India’s movement for decolonization, and emerged as two interlocutors who largely disagreed over the Indian nationalist movement’s legitimacy and authenticity. Their discussions provide meaningful insight to conversations between modern globalization and post-colonialism, two opposing perspectives. Gandhi’s and Tagore’s reconciliations of nationalism — its simultaneous promise of self-determination and its implicit exclusivity — give greater meaning to the ways in which a post-colonial perspective offers resistance to global empire by advocating for a concept of political community that transcends borders.

While both Tagore and Gandhi rejected the exclusivity of nationhood, Gandhi believed that the nation-state was the most viable way for India to attain independence. In contrast, Tagore espoused a more staunchly cosmopolitan worldview; he believed that the Western model of nation-states would bind India even further to the West and its modernity. This essay explores how Gandhi and Tagore differed in their views of nationalism, and how Gandhi sought to redefine the nation-state as one that was wholly distinct from what

Tagore argued was an exogenous category from the West. This redefinition of a traditionally narrow and exclusive idea of nationalism serves to broaden how we can think of nationalism today, as the nation has become the most basic unit of global order. The violence implicit in chauvinist nationalism is challenged by Gandhi's and Tagore's views of global community.

Globalization scholars such as Sankaran Krishna define globalization strictly as economic forces that are directed by neo-liberal policies, which create global inequalities. I seek to extend this argument beyond looking at globalization as merely constitutive of economics, by examining the cultural dimensions and implications of globalization, particularly in regard to the hegemony of the Western categories of modernity and the nation-state — an idea that is linked to neoliberal globalization. If post-colonialism is a perspective that offers resistance to neo-liberal globalization, how does it tackle the question of nationalism? How do Gandhi's and Tagore's views contribute to the resistance against globalization's tendency to elevate the nation-state? And most importantly, do Gandhi's politics offer us a way to successfully envision a political system that is beyond empire?

The Post-Colonial Perspective

In order to fully understand what a post-colonial perspective is, it is necessary to articulate the forces post-colonialism resists, and the context from which it arises. As Edward Said proposed, colonialism is an

extension and a consequence of imperialism, which is “the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory.”² Colonialism, therefore, is the “implanting of settlements on distant territory.”³ While colonialism manifested as a form of dominance over land, its cultural impact and resonances were perhaps even more profound. We can draw similar references to current international affairs. Until recently, the U.S. has been aggressively engaging in military occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Considering these involvements as empire building gives rise to discomfort in some, but the deep impact that the U.S. actions has had on the region’s development, security, and self-determination is undeniable. Aimè Césaire describes the colonial condition as an insult on psychological and cultural fronts, bemoaning “cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, land confiscated... and extraordinary *possibilities* wiped out.”⁴ His depiction maintains relevance in our own context.

Globalization and post-colonialism can be thought of as competing narratives of modernization and underdevelopment, each consonant with their respective “intellectual heirs” of neo-liberal globalization and post-colonialism.⁵ The post-colonial perspective can be framed in opposition to the inequalities that globalization engenders on a global scale, as it “is the child of the second story, that of underdevelopment and of resistance to the story of modernization.”⁶ Post-colonialism identifies inequalities as inextricably cultural, and rooted in Western knowledge production as well as capitalist forms of production. The post-colonial perspective,

oftentimes forming a natural partner in socialist thought as in the example of Frantz Fanon, Gandhi, or Jawaharlal Nehru, rejects market fundamentalism as the final arbiter of people and politics. In this sense, post-colonialism “enables resistance to, and is itself been enabled by, neo-liberal globalization.”⁷ Post-colonialism, just as Gandhi’s vision of total human relatedness, enables us to think beyond the nation state, or at the very least to challenge the state’s origins and its normative implications.

The Perspective of Globalization

Globalization can be loosely defined in “spatial terms as the spread of transplanetary — and in recent times more particularly supraterritorial — connections between people.”⁸ It represents a transcendence of borders, culture, time, and configurations of space. This increased interconnectedness is mediated by flows of people, capital, international organizations, and ideas. Four frameworks that are often used to theorize the ways in which globalization promotes interconnected spaces are internationalization, liberalization, universalization, and westernization. Globalization can also be discursively treated as a hybrid of three metaphors: the global village (promoting cosmopolitanism), the global marketplace (predicated on neo-liberalism), and the global empire.

Neo-liberal globalization, in particular, presumes and creates a commodified world in which market-driven competition determines the value of the collective benefit.⁹ Karl Polyani elaborates on this idea:

The ideas of the importance of the trading spirit of man, the commodification of everything, and the emergence of the self-centered, utility-maximizing homo economicus were not merely attributes of modern societies; they were self-fulfilling prophecies in that if we began to interact with each other on these premises, our very actions would create the world that was ostensibly our referent.”¹⁰

The world we have created as both our referent and our reality is one in which economic power expresses strength. Gandhi’s vehement rejection of this notion of power, and his elevation of love as an ultimate form of power, seeks directly to combat a system in which economic power is the final arbiter.

Globalization, as the “intellectual heir” of modernity, also promotes a methodological individualism — the idea that the individual is the fundamental unit of society and of rational thought. This idea can also be thought of as a rejection of human relatedness, as it privileges the self over the collective. Methodological individualism finds resonance in globalization’s reliance on the category of methodological nationalism, which defines and asserts the nation-state as the singular logical unit of political community: “One of the key moments in the consolidation of neo-liberal hegemony arises from our inability to conceive of ourselves outside a national cartography of the world.”¹¹ Globalization hinges on such a positioning

of itself as a logical commonsense, as the only logical way to think of how the world is organized.

Why Thinking Post-Colonially About Globalization is Important

As Fernando Henrique Cardoso has written, it is important to embark upon a project of “writing, and theorizing back”¹² — that is, to root critiques of contemporary international politics in the genealogies of global power. Most importantly, contemporary geopolitics are unquestionably shaped and informed by colonial and imperial violence, whose legacies continue to affect cultural, political, and economic development in fundamental ways. As Walter Mignola suggests, globalization has perhaps given new forms of center/periphery orientations, but it has certainly not made them obsolete: “globalization has neither erased nor supplanted this distinction, which has been maintained through 500 years of Western religious, economic, and cultural expansion.”¹³ Globalization has not only failed to erase these distinctions, it has drastically exacerbated global inequality, enabling exploitation and underdevelopment in some parts of the world, while bearing witness to burgeoning growth in others.

Another way of thinking about globalization’s inequalities is elucidated through what Cuban artist and writer Mosquera calls “axial globalization” and the “zone of silence.”¹⁴ His argument is that interconnectedness develops only in centers of power, while countries on the periphery remain disconnected or are “only connected

indirectly via and under the control of the centres.”¹⁵ In this way, the inequalities that globalization engenders promotes an uneven level of globalization in resource-limited countries.

Modernity and its Intellectual Heirs

The cursory discussion of neo-liberal globalization discussed above is predicated on the notion of modernity as the necessary antecedent for both globalization and singular nationalism. The Eurocentric origin of the concept of modernity presented an active site of contention for anti-colonial nationalists such as Gandhi and Tagore. “Modernity” was a fundamentally Eurocentric notion, as what was defined and evaluated as modernization was born out of and descriptive of the West’s own development. In this sense, Gandhi’s and Tagore’s struggles aimed to re-define the meaning of progress.

Modernization was an idea that implied progress, and was articulated in the West as a description of developments within itself. Modernization was initially understood as the spread of rational humanism, democracy, and nationalism; however, its normative biases are undoubtedly Western-centric and self-referential, as Sankaran Krishna states: “For a variety of reasons, often left unexplained by modernization theorists, these desirable attributes happened to be more prevalent among individuals in the societies of Western Europe and relatively lacking among those in the rest of the world...”¹⁶ It is interesting to note that

one of the key attributes that modernity articulated was a scientific rather than a spiritual approach to understanding the world. This central dichotomy appears again during the Indian nationalist movement in which a nationalist space for India was largely carved out based on spiritual lines — an important construction for Gandhi's and Tagore's thought, which will be discussed later.

Just as the economic policies of neo-liberal globalization assumed an assertive tone of commonsense logic, so did modernization come to have a similar, “positive, progressive, and seductive orientation,” such that any position that was against modernization would be necessarily deemed “irrational, backward, and retrogressive.”¹⁷ Articulated from a dependency theory perspective — which in many ways parallels Gandhi's perspective — the anti-globalization stance is also opposed to the asserted binary of modernity versus tradition that so often was employed to characterize development in the Third World. Just as Latin American social scientists “drew attention to the predominance of dependency relations between developed and underdeveloped countries,”¹⁸ so was Gandhi keenly aware of and vociferous about India's coerced economic dependency on British goods and markets. In this way, Gandhi's vehement indictment of the West and its modernity served to challenge modernization and its impositions of “modern” and “progressive,” in opposition to “traditional,” and “backward.” *Who has the right to determine the meaning of “progress?”*

National Self-Determination as a Form of Post-Colonial Resistance

The central question of why the nation-state assumed particular significance as the locus of resistance in anti-colonial movements naturally arises from the preceding discussion of anti-colonial struggles against globalizing forces and the attendant economic exploitation. Was the aspiration to modular, independent nation-states truly liberating, or did adopting the nation-state further root the non-West to a colonial legacy? Partha Chatterjee asks a similar question: "Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of anti-colonial resistance and post-colonial misery."¹⁹ Chatterjee's trenchant critique of the anti-colonial movement's re-articulations of methodological nationalism resonated with Tagore's own critique of nationalism.

Imperial globalizing forces can be thought of as trends that promote unequal interdependence. Even in the mid-nineteenth century, in their *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels described what would now be termed globalization as an interdependence that allowed a global bourgeoisie to make "barbarian and semi-barbarian countries *dependent* on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West."²⁰ In this way, the economic linkages between metropole and metropolis went hand in hand with the civilizing mission — a racist project against which Gandhi and Indian nationalists actively struggled. Because

inequality was largely created by this unequal dependency, an assertion of autonomy and statehood was seen as a method of resistance and legitimacy. If imperialism is viewed as usurping non-Western nations' rights to sovereignty, then the assertion of sovereignty expresses self-rule, or *swaraj*, against imperial dominance. This was largely the rationale behind Gandhi's own nationalism.

Tagore's and Gandhi's Meanings of Indian Nationalism: Defining Self-hood

Tagore's and Gandhi's interpretations of the Indian nation exist as particular examples within the larger context of the post-colonial perspective and its coexistent anti-colonial nationalist movements. Their conversations concerning the creation of the Indian nation state involved not only an imagining of political legitimacy, but an assertion of cultural legitimacy, as well. Benedict Anderson describes movements of decolonization as "the 'last wave' of a global diffusion of a modern culture of nationalism,"²¹ which resonates with the fact that Gandhi and Tagore were in many ways recipients of such a pervasive culture of nationalism. Gandhi's and Tagore's critiques of nation took on different political meanings, though the ultimate vision and aspiration of moving beyond empire was a shared one. In this regard, they did not view the colonial legacy as one that was defined solely by economic and political domination, but by a larger "violent planetary consciousness" that needed to be undone at the level of culture.²²

Ashis Nandy relies on a psychoanalytic framework to examine the psychological particularities and nuances of Tagore's and Gandhi's ideas regarding their reconciliations of three main dichotomies that categorized the colonial experience: East versus West, modernity versus tradition, and past versus present. The differences between Gandhi and Tagore become clear in light of Nandy's assertion that Gandhi sought to reconcile these differences with the "little" culture of India, while Tagore addressed these contradictions in the realm of "high" culture. Gandhi's non-violent and inclusive conception of nationalism evolved from a critique of Western nationalism; Tagore, on the other hand, articulated a vision of cosmopolitanism, as for him, nationalism and its implicit exclusivity "gradually grew to become illegitimate."²³ Cosmopolitanism, as represented in Tagore, and nationalism in Gandhi, however, represents a false dichotomy, as both thinkers were ideologically and categorically opposed to an exclusive identity for India. In this vein, conversations between Gandhi and Tagore also illuminate the ways in which re-defined nationalisms and cosmopolitanism can be read more for their continuities, rather than their differences.

Indian Nationalism: Gandhi's "Ambition Greater than Independence"²⁴

Gandhi was one of the few Indians to successfully defy the exogenous, colonial categories of power by wholly rejecting their validity. In this sense, Gandhi's defiant form of nationalism was one of the primary methods of his political resistance. Gandhi's full embrace of the folk

traditions of India and his identification with the masses was also a fundamental tenet of the mass mobilization method of resistance, which evolved to largely conflate an anti-imperialist stance with an anti-modernity one. Gandhi's trenchant critiques of modernity and industrialization went hand-in-hand with his critiques of Western nationalism. His radical political treatise, *Hind Swaraj*, provided the platform for such a construction of Western empire and modernity as nearly synonymous.

While Gandhi was opposed to Western nationalism, he embraced the notion of a non-violent, inclusive nationalism that existed independently of the West, saying, "My ambition is much higher than independence. Through the deliverance of India, I seek to deliver the so-called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of Western exploitation."²⁵ In this way, Gandhi's redefinition of nationalism served as the usurpation of a category that had no acknowledged roots in the Third World, from the exclusive grasp of Western political thought.

More importantly, Gandhi sought to redefine citizenship, rights, and concomitantly the political community represented by the nation. His reconceptualization of national belonging can be understood from his rethinking of human rights — a term which he did not favour, as he sought to privilege duties over rights. This was the main reason he did not support H.G. Wells' plan for a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which gave rise to the 1948 UN charter. Instead, Gandhi called for a "charter for the duties of

humanity.”²⁶ In this sense, Gandhi’s vision of the political community of nations also emphasized duties rather than entitlements, as in the Western conception of nation.

Tagore’s Cosmopolitanism

Tagore’s alternative to nationalism was articulated through a cosmopolitan worldview that included an emphasis on Indian civilization, rather than the Indian nation. His vision was articulated as “a civilizational concept of universalism embedded in the tolerance encoded in various traditional ways of life in a highly diverse, plural society.”²⁷ Cosmopolitanism offers an alternative to a “particularistic mode of consciousness or even a privative ethnic identity”²⁸ that tends to narrowly define most nationalism. Cosmopolitanism, as such, can be thought of as encapsulating a human community and transcending regional particularities.

Tagore aspired to communicate the ways in which nationalist discourses were steeped in colonial ones, and he sought to imagine an India that went beyond the particularities of racial, ethnic, or even cultural identities. He saw the history of India’s civilization as one of “continual adjustment,” rather than one of aggression.²⁹ Such a concept of India as an essentially syncretic and pluralist society also echoes the recent writings of Amartya Sen, who works within a Tagorean framework, and gives new voice to the argument that pluralism has been a pervasive social reality within India and is integral to India’s underlying culture. Nandy utilizes this notion of the “civilizational aspect,” citing Tagore’s “dream that

Indian civilization with its demonstrated capacity to live with and creatively use contradictions and inconsistencies would produce a national ideology that would transcend nationalism.”³⁰ This idea of using national forms of identifying to transcend nationalism also speaks to Gandhi’s and Tagore’s shared desire to articulate India’s anti-colonial resistance movement as one that promoted a universal ethic, which fundamentally values common humanity.

Tagore’s literary corpus contains many expressions of India as a holy land that is often feminized and “*darshaned*,” or worshipped. Despite his contributions to the literary dimensions of “*darshaning*” the nation, Tagore was wholeheartedly opposed to the kind of blind worship and exaltation of nation that the nationalist movement engendered, saying, “Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live.”³¹ Tagore further expresses this reluctance in his novel, *Ghaire Bhaire*: “I am willing to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right, which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it.”³² In this sense, while Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* asked Indians to hold onto a sacred, maternal imagination of Indian civilization “as a child onto its mother’s breast,” Tagore considered such veneration of the nation as a limited perspective.

While nation, for Gandhi, represented a movement towards self-determination and liberty, the same idea conjured images of Western dominance for Tagore: “The

Nation of the West forges its iron chains of organization which are the most relentless and unbreakable that have ever been manufactured in the whole history of man.”³³ A staunch anti-imperialist, Tagore believed that nationalism was not inherent to India, which he saw as more socially than politically united. Tagore believed nationalism represented an attempt to “take into itself a history which was not the outcome of its own living.”³⁴ As Partha Chatterjee argues in the *Nation and its Fragments*, nationalism was a Western import by the elite classes, and was a remnant of the psychological effects of the colonial experience:

Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and post-colonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized.³⁵

Tagore subscribed to the same view of nationalism as an idea that was articulated primarily through Western and modern discourses, and for this reason, he believed that a victory for nationalism would mean a victory of the West over Indian civilization.”³⁶

In contrast to Tagore’s ambivalence about the making of the Indian nation, Gandhi worked to synthesize ideas of universal humanity within the framework of national self-determination. In *Hind Swaraj*, written early in his political career, Gandhi assumes an uncompromising

stance against modernity, which he equates with the West. In response to Nandy, Chatterjee, and Tagore's assertions that nationalism was a Western import, Gandhi claimed that India, prior to colonialism, was a united nation that was later divided by imperialist powers:

We were one nation before [they] came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom. Subsequently they divided us.³⁷

Just as Gandhi sought to rethink nationalism as an organizing principle to which India could lay legitimate claim, so did Nehru seek to articulate nationalism as an endogenous category. Nehru, one of the most important figures in the Indian independence movement, served as India's first prime minister until his death. Though he was greatly influenced by socialist principles, he acknowledged nationalism's primacy and utility over socialism. Nehru sought to defend nationalism as a form of Indian tradition that was being revisited during its decolonization struggle: "Nationalism is essentially a group memory of past achievements, traditions and experiences, and nationalism is stronger today than it has ever been."³⁸ Nehru saw communism and its allegiance to an international proletariat as opposed to nationalist aspirations, which he believed were representative of the Indian people's will, saying, "I know that in India the Communist Party is completely divorced from, and is ignorant of, the national traditions that fill the mind of

the people.”³⁹ Here, Nehru argues that nationalism is part of the cultural fabric of India and is an idea that is indigenous to it — an argument that is resonant with Gandhi’s claim that national identity existed before interactions with the West. Additionally, Nehru sought to define Indian culture as one that was fundamentally syncretic and able to encapsulate and reconcile multiple ideas at once, citing the example that, “The bitter conflict between science and religion which shook up Europe in the nineteenth century would have no reality in India,”⁴⁰ which further sought to challenge and resist the orientalist ascriptions of traditionalism or backwardness that were born out of Western discourses of modernity.

In stark contrast to Gandhi and Nehru, Frantz Fanon, a revolutionary thinker from Martinique actively involved in decolonization struggles and a theorist of the colonial condition, believed that the nation-state would only propagate inequalities and hierarchies, as he viewed it as a category of the elite colonized classes. Fanon’s argument, a far more vehement extension of Tagore’s, hinged on the premise that nationalism could not be separated from its methodological roots in Western ideas of modernity. Fanon, like Chatterjee and Anderson to an extent, believed that nationalism was an exogenous category promoted by the colonial elites. He produced excoriating critiques of anti-colonial nationalism, calling it “literally....good for nothing.”⁴¹

For Fanon, nationalism was nearly synonymous with what could now be termed neo-liberalism, as he perceived it as a project that “has nothing to do with transforming

the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on a mask of neo-colonialism.”⁴²

Half-Revolutions and Seeking Legibility: Bringing Gandhi and Tagore into Perspective

Gandhi and other mainstream Indian nationalists recognized that they were, perhaps unwittingly, the recipients of a “planetary consciousness” in which the modern nation-state was necessary for political legitimacy. For this reason, they maintained that India’s claim to legitimacy and the struggle for self-hood, or *swaraj*, would need an organizing and legitimating language of power despite its roots in Western empire. Nationalist arguments that the nation was a *sui generis* Indian category could not escape the grasp of Western, methodological nationalism, which remained at its core an instrument of denying sovereignty to the Third World. Methodological nationalism and the modernizing forces of globalization are closely intertwined, and Gandhi’s and Tagore’s re-articulations of and challenges to the nation did not achieve a complete rupture from these Western forms and definitions of political legitimacy. Instead, the revolutionary principles that Gandhi articulated brought about gradual political and discursive changes.

Gandhi’s nationalism can be thought of as a concession in some ways, and it represents the anti-colonial movement’s desire to acquire not only political

autonomy, but legitimacy as well. In this sense, even though post-colonialism seeks to resist globalization, globalization's prevention of our ability to "conceive of ourselves outside a national cartography of the world"⁴³ was not fully undone by Gandhi's nationalism. Rather, Gandhi's quest for legibility pushed him to work within national spaces.

Though Tagore's cosmopolitanism was wary of the implicit limitations of nationalism's normative idea of political community, it brings to light the ways in which the Indian nation was imagined to embody a hybrid of the universal and the local. Though these two perspectives are seemingly dissimilar, Gandhi's and Tagore's views of Indian civilization represent how nationalism can be ardently re-defined and challenged to signify legitimacy in opposition to dominance. At the same time, a hybrid of Gandhi's and Tagore's visions lends itself to an imagining of the nation as a member of a global and human community. Their vision asserts a foundation in a perceived moral force in opposition to the violence of imperialism.

Gandhi's redefinition of the nation as an organizing principle was convincing in the sense that the nation emerged as a multi-layered idea that could mold itself to the kind of Indian civilizational concept that Tagore articulated. This vision did not, however, fully transcend the ways in which globalization validates not only a world that is viewed primarily through borders, but a worldview that determines which people are visible. Though they aspired to transcend the synonymy of

independence with national sovereignty, their articulations were limited to the categories against which they were dissenting; national borders and global cartographies created unavoidable boundaries amidst their transcendent ideas. Despite the limitations immanent to anti-colonial nationalism, it is through their aspirations of making a full break from empire that Tagore and Gandhi offer important, yet incipient, ways in which to conceive of cosmopolitan and inclusive nationalisms as sites and languages of resistance. When we think of our own patriotism or nationalism, it is imperative to remember both Gandhi's and Tagore's ultimate aspiration of thinking beyond exclusive boundaries and borders — even if we live within such limits. Such a cosmopolitanism and universal outlook prevents one from advocating for chauvinist nationalism; if we are all really interconnected, then our patriotism cannot be an aggressively exclusive sentiment. Gandhi's and Tagore's visions offer us ways to question the language and categories of imperial dissent in search of a politics beyond empire — a vision of political community that is yet to be fully realized.

Notes

- 1 Nandy, Ashis. *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, 3.
- 2 Said, 8.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Slater, David. *Geopolitics and the Post-Colonial: Rethinking North-South Relations*. New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2004, 175.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Krishna, Sankaran. *Globalization and Post-colonialism: Hegemony and Resistance in the Twenty-First Century*. US: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009, 2.
- 7 Krishna, 61.
- 8 Scholte, J.A. 2005. *Globalization Theory: A Post-Mortem*, *International Politics*, Vol. 42, No 1, pp 2-75, 49.
- 9 Krishna, 160.
- 10 Krishna, 158.
- 11 Krishna, 161.
- 12 Slater, 168.
- 13 Slater, 169.
- 14 Slater, 170.
- 15 Slater, 171.
- 16 Krishna, 9.
- 17 Slater, 62-63.
- 18 Slater, 123.
- 19 Chatterjee, 5.
- 20 Marx, K. and Engels, F. *The Communist Manifesto — A Modern Edition*. London: Verso Books, 1998, 40.
- 21 Duara, 131.
- 22 Krishna, 172.
- 23 Nandy 1994, xi.
- 24 Duara, 145.
- 25 Duara, 148.
- 26 Duara, 147.

- 27 Nandy, Ashis, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, xi.
- 28 Cheah, P, and B Robbins, Eds. *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, 21.
- 29 Tagore, Rabindranath. *Nationalism*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917, 2.
- 30 Nandy 1994, 83.
- 31 Sen, Sachin. *The Political Thought of Tagore*. Calcutta: General Printers and Ltd., 1947, 20.
- 32 Ibid., 22.
- 33 Nandy, 1989, 6.
- 34 Nandy, 1989, 6.
- 35 Chatterjee, 5.
- 36 Nandy, 1994, 49.
- 37 M. K. Gandhi; edited by Anthony J. Parel *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 48.
- 38 Nehru, 515.
- 39 Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Discovery of India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, 521.
- 40 Nehru, 523.
- 41 Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove P, 2005, 176.
- 42 Fanon, 152.
- 43 Krishna, 161.



Gandhi nurses Parchure Shastri, a Sanskrit scholar afflicted by leprosy, at Sabarmati Ashram, 1940

Rights and Duty

Towards Claiming Responsibilities

Social justice has long been seen as a struggle, an endeavor that involves fighting for rights. Western human rights discourse emphasizes entitlement. It is assumed that we are owed certain inalienable rights — the codification of which have been formally centralized in and by the West. Gandhi's emphasis on duties as the *sine qua non* antecedent for the attainment of rights offers an entirely different way to think about responsibility. Instead of "fighting" for rights, Gandhi's method calls for the performance of duties; from the performance of these rights, he insisted, we arrive at human rights.

The fulfillment of duty is integral to Gandhi's values of service and trusteeship — two principles of personal involvement that are ever more relevant today. Gandhi rarely referenced human rights in the way we speak of them today. Instead, he continually punctuated people's individual responsibilities and believed that rights came out of personal action. This radical reunderstanding of what we owe, in relation to what we get, is at the core of Gandhi's ethics. Thinking about human rights as a

consequence of selfless action marks a shift in how we can approach issues of social justice. What we think of as rights-based approaches need to be emphasized as duties-based. This essay explores the implications of this attitude, most especially regarding our own engagements with justice.

Breaking from the West's Human Rights Tradition

Central to the language of human rights is the assumption that each individual is granted certain basic rights simply by virtue of being human.¹ While the concept of spiritual laws transcending human-made ones is universal, the articulation of "human rights" as a distinct concept is Western in origin. The first overarching and widely accepted statement codifying human rights is found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949).² For this reason, Gandhi's voluminous writings on his political and moral thought are largely without explicit reference to "human rights." He does not explicate his views of human rights, nor does he make apparent the philosophical antecedents for the existence of such rights. Rather, the rights for which Gandhi dedicated his life and work are inherent in his theological views, in his adherence to non-violence, and in his search for truth through truthful means.

In order to define the rights necessary for a moral state, founded on the principles of truth and non-violence, Gandhi submitted a Resolution of Fundamental Rights to the Indian congress. This resolution was designed to protect the rights of minorities, create full equality for

women, inspire religious neutrality — specifically between Hindus and Muslims—and ensure “just and equitable relations between capital and labor.”³ Furthermore, Gandhi insisted upon the restoration of “free speech, free association and free Press as constituting almost the whole *swaraj*.”⁴ While the content of the nineteen clauses in his resolution are akin to Western treatises on civil rights, Gandhi came to the understanding of those same rights from a markedly non-Western standpoint.

The Duties of Citizenship

Though Gandhi advocated for many of the same notions of equality as in the West, he did not share its discursive tradition. Gandhi’s departure from this epistemology is most apparent in his insistence upon the idea that the realization of *swaraj* demands performance of duty: “In *swaraj* based on *ahimsa* people need not know their rights, but it is necessary for them to know their duties... those only are true rights which flow from a due performance of one’s duties.”⁵ He believed that rights of citizenship are owed only to those who serve their state, and that within an ideal society, people who obtain rights would exercise them only for the greater welfare of others and not for themselves.

In this sense, Gandhi viewed rights of citizenship as distinct from the rights of humanity, which are spiritually rather than politically or socially determined. Gandhi’s emphasis on duties does not preclude his insistence that people’s needs should be dignified; instead, it offers a

method of thinking about how to affect these rights. The primacy of one's own responsibilities is part of Gandhi's aspiration of collective self-regulation, an essential concept of *sarvodaya*, or "progress for all." Just as human relatedness is the basis of *satyagraha*, it also provides the impetus for Gandhi's articulation of rights and duties, which are integral to sustainable social progress.

Gandhi was the product of his Hindu background, which was not involved with a rights discourse that aimed to protect the individual from the state. Rather, it emphasized the protection of collective rights and placed emphasis on the common duties of individuals as well as collective groups: "The proper question is not what the rights of a citizen are, but rather what constitutes the duties of a citizen. Fundamental rights can only be those the exercise of which is not only in the interest of the citizen but that of the whole world."⁶ Rights are, therefore not about individual well-being, but about social progress at large. This view of fundamental rights opens a discussion of the distinction between true rights and privileges. The issue of gun control provides an opportunity to consider the principle of a right being beneficial to more than a group of individuals. If gun ownership carries the implicit threat of promoting violence and potentially harming others, it does not benefit the collective as much as it does the individual owner. In this way, it emerges as more a license than a basic right of citizenship.

The difference between license and rights points to

the imperative role of duty in creating autonomy. Gandhi argued that an assertion of rights without consideration of corresponding duties results in license, rather than in true liberty:

Liberty cannot be secured mainly by claiming it. An atmosphere of liberty must be created within us. Many a time we confuse license for liberty and lose the latter. License leads one to selfishness, whereas liberty leads one to supreme good. License destroys society, liberty gives it life.”⁷

If we continue with the consideration of gun ownership, we realize that the ultimate aim of protecting oneself, family, and community is not achieved solely by the ownership of guns. One could, in fact, argue that individual gun ownership promotes more domestic violence and creates greater opportunities for danger. In this sense, the legalization of guns does not create safety because safety involves a myriad of attitudinal and cultural changes.

This idea is especially relevant when we think about contemporary human rights organizations or movements that have the noble aspirations to claim rights from governments for people. The nuanced distinction between license and liberty encourages a more holistic reassessment of a rights-based paradigm. Rights cannot just be won or legislated; they emerge from a larger context of justice that honors dignity, and

for which all people work. Of course, legislating certain laws and holding those in power accountable is imperative to ensure that people are treated equitably. At the same time, however, it is not nearly enough. We see this through myriad *de jure* social legislations that have yet to manifest results.

Gandhi asserted that placing too great an emphasis on usurping rights would detract from the debts that people owe to others. However, he also believed that rights and duties correspond to one another. Rights are necessary in that they enable people to perform their duties. The right to assemble non-violently in defiance of an unjust law, for example, is necessary because it allows individuals to fulfill their duties as human beings, aiming to implement truth. This thought can be extended to Gandhi's indictment of modernization, which he saw as stripping away rights and thus, the attendant ability to fulfill the most basic duties as citizens and people. Gandhi believed that as members of a larger cosmos, each individual has debts to repay and obligations to fulfill to themselves, as well as the greater world. The repayment of those debts corresponds to man's eternal quest for truth, which is the ultimate task of a human being. To rob people of their rights, or ability to perform duties, is to rob them of their ability to be seekers of truth, and by extension, to deny their humanity.

The primacy of fulfilling one's *dharma*, or duty, is also evident in Gandhi's view that *satyagraha* is not the right to resist, but the duty and moral obligation to resist injustice. The intention of *satyagraha* is to spark

moral growth and a reformation in the *satyagrahi* as well as his or her opponent. It relies on the dynamics of conversion, rather than coercion. In this regard, *satyagraha* is more a method of fulfilling an individual's supreme duty to realize truth, than a means to fight for the securing of individual rights.

Trusteeship

Gandhi's privileging of fundamental duties over rights gives rise to a doctrine of social responsibility through self-regulating behavior and trusteeship. Concomitant with this expanded idea of what we owe to others was an abiding sense of responsibility for others, a system that is accompanied by a broadening of community. Gandhi's thoughts on trusteeship are deeply connected with economic equality, but they are rooted again in the belief in human relatedness and the practice of love. Trusteeship is about power, and the awakening of consciousness that comes with having it.

We have come to think of governmental structures and large institutions as our trustees. We have social welfare safeguards that help support us if we grow old, fall ill, or lose employment. These kinds of structures do not replace our individual responsibility to support our communities. The idea of trusteeship is not the same as aid, or charity. It should not involve temporary donations, but instead it takes the form of altruism that is far more expansive than "helping others," but is treated as a basic duty of sharing what we have. Most fundamentally, the notion of trusteeship is a revision and bold extension of

ownership. This idea derives from a love for others and gives rise to Gandhi's belief that "love and exclusive possession can never go together."⁸

Individual social responsibility is the self-regulating ethic of those who follow *satyagraha*. Gandhi did not value the idea of private ownership, but he was also wary of state centralization, even though it was superior to private ownership in his opinion.

It is my firm conviction that if the State suppressed capitalism by violence, it will be caught in the coils of violence itself, and will fail to develop non-violence at any time. The State represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence. Hence I prefer the doctrine of trusteeship.⁹

Trusteeship is at its core a call for economic and social equality. If we do not have the right to claim the wealth that we may acquire, we are necessarily compelled to give it back. It is an attitude that looks at the collective rather than the Self as the unit of social organization. In a time when global inequality is increasingly devastating and grotesque in its manifestations, it is more urgent to begin thinking about how we are trustees of our resources, rather than the owners of them.

Gandhi's trenchant criticisms of inequality and those who promoted it could have been written in 2010. Most of us have been exposed to inequalities in some form—be it Mukesh Ambani's 27-storey, billion dollar home in Mumbai with slum views, or the fact that 25 top hedge fund managers make more than 6,80,000 American teachers, who teach 13 million students. Such unjust disparities between those who exploit others to gain excess and those who are barely getting by are at the core of any question of rights. Gandhi's remarks on such inequality offer an affirmation for the challenge of implanting trusteeship, but speak to the urgency of the task, nonetheless:

The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class nearby cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same power as the richest in the land. A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good.

I adhere to my doctrine of trusteeship in spite of the ridicule that has been poured upon it. It is true that it is difficult to reach. So is non-violence. But we made up our minds in 1920 to negotiate that steep ascent. We have

found it worth the effort. It involves a daily growing appreciation of the working of non-violence... I think we know the violent way. It has not succeeded anywhere.¹⁰

Untouchability

Of the reforms that Gandhi advocated in his constructive program of 1941, the abolition of untouchability is most directly involved with contemporary human rights discourse. Discrimination based on religious caste has been an historic evil within South Asia, and is one whose socio-political effects continue to be seen in Indian culture. The discriminatory attitude that had its origins in ritual cleanliness translated into systemic violence through structures that mediated social exclusion of dalits (the self-designated term for people of the lowest caste) with regards to education, economic opportunity, health, and employment, among other things. Untouchability was the social issue that most concerned Gandhi, as he saw its eradication as essential for the attainment of Indian political and moral progress.

Even in his campaigns against untouchability, Gandhi primarily addressed the wealthy and powerful, asking them to rise to their moral duties and act as the trustees of the marginalized, rather than directly demanding increased rights for the suppressed. His aim was to make those who had become corrupt and morally compromised more human by the practice of methods

that were in accordance with truth and morality. Gandhi wanted to broaden the consciousness of the wealthy by convincing them that they were not the sole owners of their wealth, but simply its trustees, whose job was to ensure that those resources would be used for the welfare of all. He treated the granting of rights to dalits as secondary, because he held the duties of the Hindus in power to be the necessary antecedent to rights for the poor and dalits. This idea of power as having attendant responsibilities also goes hand in hand with Gandhi's rethinking of what power means. In this framework, monetary, intellectual, or spiritual resources are not thought to be privileges to which one is entirely entitled, but as opportunities and obligations for generosity.

Gandhi rarely advocated for a collective uprising of the dalits through non-violent means, nor did he support measures to protect the dalits' rights by any special protective, legislative acts. His cautionary advice against undue emphasis on demanding "rights" stems from his assertion that an insistence on rights and not duties would lead to disorder and chaos, "While it is true that these hereditary inequalities must go as being injurious to the well-being of society, the unabashed assertion of rights of the hitherto down-trodden millions is equally injurious, if not more so to the same well-being."¹¹ In 1932 Gandhi even commenced a fast unto death in protest of a legislative act that would have created a separate electorate within parliament for the dalits. He was vehemently opposed to such a move because he felt that it would give rise to polarization and segregation, rather than unity.¹²

In Gandhi's campaign against untouchability, he deemed those of the most marginalized classes *Harijan*, literally "Children of God," a title which served to remind people of the essential unity and equality that people had been guilty of betraying by oppressing their own brothers and sisters. Though this term is retrospectively condescending, it is imperative to remember Gandhi's intentions, even if his denunciation of caste discrimination did not go far enough. Gandhi prescribed the method of *satyagraha* and self-sacrifice in an effort to convince orthodox Hindus of their grave mistake in denying the dignity of an entire segment of the population. He believed that they would be changed only by appealing to their hearts. He further urged that dalits fulfill their duties by purifying themselves, by living righteously before demanding increased rights.¹³ In this way, Gandhi's method of stemming social inequality was resonant with the transformative power of *satyagraha*. Changing people's attitudes was necessary to create an atmosphere that honored rights, just as persuading and not coercing was the method to obtain political victories.

Gandhi's stance against untouchability was principally motivated by his religious and spiritual views, as he considered "untouchability as a blot upon Hinduism."¹⁴ It was only secondarily an issue of social justice. His fight was against the unjust and misconstrued creation of a separate caste for those who did the work of what was later designated as "untouchable," not the system of caste divisions itself. He believed that "untouchability is no part of Hinduism. It is its excrescence to be removed by every effort, and as such,

the accretion of untouchability has “degraded us, and made us pariahs of the Empire.”¹⁵ To redress this issue, Gandhi called for extensive religious and social change and reforms. He asserted that

Swaraj means that not a single individual shall for a moment arrogantly think that he can crush with impunity meek individuals. Unless this condition is fulfilled, we will gain Swaraj only to lose it the next moment. We are no better than the brutes until we have purged ourselves of the sins we have committed against our weaker brethren.¹⁶

Gandhi equated the evils of the upper classes and castes with the evils of the British government, whose treatment of the Indians paralleled the Hindus’ treatment of the untouchables, saying, “I am not interested in freeing India merely from the British yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. Hence for me the movement of *swaraj* is a movement of self-purification.”¹⁷ Gandhi believed that without a non-violent society, true change would never occur. Rather, power would simply be transferred from the hands of the British to those of wealthy Indians, who would then assume similar roles as oppressors.

Gandhi’s campaign against untouchability makes apparent the differences between Gandhian human rights and the Western notion of human rights. While the

social and political manifestations of these rights are very much the same, the foundations upon which they are built, as well as the means for achieving their ends, are markedly different. Gandhi's unique contribution to the attainment of rights was his implementation of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* to create a collective movement. His undying faith and trust in God informed his social values, and most importantly, his concepts of equality and justice. He did not view justice as simply the granting of rights; instead, justice was a multidimensional ideal in which *ahimsa* was used to attain truth, and individuals, inspired by a consciousness of the unity of all life, fulfilled their duties to ensure the welfare of all. Within this paradigm, rights unquestionably follow from the fulfillment of duties.

As a student of the Bhagavad Gita, Gandhi believed that action performed with an attitude of service to humanity was the ultimate means of self-realization — self-realization being both an inalienable right and a duty. He proclaimed that every waking moment of his life was an attempt to realize truth and by extension, God.¹⁸ Ultimately, Gandhi's movement to honor human dignity through the accordance of due rights was a movement towards an ideal society based upon a system of ethics derived from a spiritual and faith-based science, rather than an empirical one. This reliance on spiritual faith for political and social ideas also conveys the need for us to think more ethically, and not to conflate secularism with a lack of spiritual consciousness. For Gandhi, spirituality was steeped in the doctrine of human relatedness, and for this reason, it demonstrates how

spiritual values can inform political ones without compromising secular ideals.

Service as Spiritual Discipline

Our shared goal should be sufficiency for all and not excess for some. This central idea within Gandhi's vision of *sarvodaya* (progress for all) was at the crux of his socialist views, and lent itself to the main principle of serving others. For Gandhi, service was not just a periodic act of kindness or generosity, it was a motivating ethos. It was a spiritual discipline, articulated through the Hindu idea of *karma yoga* that aims to unite God and man through righteous action and the service of others. The notion of *dharma*, righteous action or duty, is at the center of *karma yoga*, and through these spiritual relationships, we can see the primacy of duty in Gandhi's thought.

Gandhi's emphasis on service to others as a basic human duty, rather than as an act of charity, enables a fresher, more sustainable way to think about social justice work. Often, endeavors to create change are steeped in the language of "helping others." There is a false altruism attributed to many of our actions — be it building a school, volunteering at a clinic, or donating funds to a hospital.

Most often, these sorts of actions are informed by an attitude that does not view magnanimity as an obligation, but as a special virtue. Identifying service as a basic human duty in the sphere of human relatedness and

trusteeship encourages thinking about the people at the receiving end of our actions as partners, and not projects. Gandhi's idea of human relatedness and trusteeship makes us rethink giving. In this light, service is not an occasion of cultivated virtue, but rather it is the performance of essential duties — the performance of which are integral to claiming rights.

The idea that we ought to serve from a consciousness of our connection is applicable in any commitment to bridging inequalities and granting basic opportunities to people. For Gandhi, economic inequality and social responsibility were integrally linked, as he believed that we ought to be personally involved with ensuring others are not in need: "We should be ashamed of resting or having a square meal so long as there is one able-bodied man or woman without work or food."¹⁹ While serving others was a critical component to attaining swaraj and social progress, Gandhi emphasized that service is ultimately a means to repair and build a healthy relationship with oneself. His idea that through the service to others we are truly able to find and reconnect with ourselves is ultimately about reviving a spiritual consciousness. His famous passage conveys the power of genuinely living for others as the development of a personal purpose:

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom

you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to *swaraj* for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.²⁰

If we can take any inspiration from Gandhi's life message, it is to serve dutifully and to wholly live for a cause and a set of principles beyond ourselves. Such a purposeful vision of life not only cultivates personal development and *swaraj*, it connects us deeply to what is fundamentally true: we are profoundly interconnected, and transforming ourselves and our communities are integrally linked endeavors. Most people ask at some point in their respective quests, *What is the purpose of things?* When we think of the progress of others as crucial to our own, we can come to a collective agreement to act against injustice, cultivate the necessary courage within ourselves to stand up for what we believe is right, and to consciously strive to live engaged lives. Gandhi's legacy is at its essence concerned with consistently living our convictions, and it continues to challenge us in our personal aspirations to live ethically, consciously, and peacefully.

Notes

- 1 Kurtz, Ester, Ed. *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict*, Vol. 2 San Diego: Academic Press, 1999, 167.
- 2 Borgatta, Edgar F. "Human Rights, Children's Rights, and Democracy." *Encyclopedia of Sociology* Vol. 2, New York: Macmillan Reference, 2000, 1240.
- 3 Dalton, Dennis. *Mahatma Gandhi: Non-violent Power in Action*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000, 104.
- 4 Dalton, 6.
- 5 Dalton, 106.
- 6 Parel, 89.
- 7 Dear, John, Ed. *Mohandas Gandhi: Essential Writings*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002, 55.
- 8 Gandhi, Mahatma, and Krishna Kripalani. *All Men Are Brothers: Autobiographical Reflections*. New York: Continuum, 1980, 129.
- 9 CWMG 59: 318, November 9/10, 1934.
- 10 CWMG 81: 366, December 13, 1941.
- 11 Gandhi, Mahatma. *Young India: Excerpts from 1919-1922*. New York: B. W. Huebsch Inc, 1983, 467.
- 12 Jain, Pratibha. *Gandhian Ideas, Social Movements, and Creativity*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1985, 118.
- 13 Jack, Homer A. *The Gandhian Reader*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956, 166.
- 14 Gandhi, *Young India*, 465.
- 15 Jack, 164.
- 16 Jack, 165.
- 17 CWMG 24: 227, December 6, 1924.
- 18 Gandhi. *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, 603.
- 19 Gandhi. *All Men are Brothers*, 135.
- 20 CWMG 96: 311, August 1947.

Glossary of Key Terms

Ahimsa — Non-violence; non-injury and the total absence of all forms of violence — physical, emotional, economic etc.

Brahmacharya — A spiritual doctrine of living that is predicated on vows of celibacy, simplicity, non-violence, and monasticism.

Dharma — Duty, or Righteousness

Duragraha — Passive resistance that utilizes non-violence as a policy only when expedient; One who employs duragraha is not willing to make the sacrifices necessary of satyagraha.

Sarvodaya — “Universal upliftment” or “progress for all.” The term conveys much of Gandhi’s social and economic ideals, as it is concerned mostly with ensuring full equality.

Satya — Truth, one of Gandhi’s cornerstone principles. Gandhi often equated Truth with God.

Satyagraha — Insistence on Truth. “Satya” meaning Truth and “Agraha” meaning insistence. This term encapsulated Gandhi’s method of non-violent, civil disobedience, but it also extends far beyond a political tactic and implies the active, and complete adherence to non-violence throughout all circumstances.

Swaraj — “Self-Rule” for both individual and society. The term was used by Gandhi to describe national self-determination as well as individual moral progress.



Thinking Through Gandhi is concerned with bringing the essence of Gandhi's ideas of non-violence, service, and personal development into a modern context. The book aims to inspire a desire to do more than admire the legacies of history's great peace exponents. Rather, it poses the question: In what ways does Gandhi's intellectual and spiritual legacy encourage us to think differently. How can we make real the perennial aspirations to be better, more ethical, more peaceful in our own lives and in our community living?

Krishna is an ardent student of Gandhi's ideas and has had a long-standing dedication to understanding and translating the message of non-violence. Her primary interest through this work is to reach others, who are concerned about social justice issues and are asking questions of how to apply Gandhi's groundbreaking ideas in their own communities and throughout their own living. Though Krishna has been studying Gandhi and human rights issues in India for several years, this is her first written project dedicated entirely to the subject.

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